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THE CURTAIN



THE CURTAIN

AN ANECDOTE

BY

ALEXANDER MACFARLAN
Author of "Mockery," "The Inscrutable Lovers"

"Ceux qui s'exercent à contrerouter les actions humaines ne se trouvent en aucune partie si empeschez qu'à les rapiecer et mettre à mesme lustre; car elles se contredisent communement de si estrange façon, qu'il semble impossible qu'elles soient parties de mesme boutique."

MONTAIGNE



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1921

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TO
MRS. ANTHONY ELLIS

A NOTE ON NAMES

Prefaces are usually superfluous but I wish to prevent misunderstanding. The names of my characters are not veiled personalities. I have done my best to avoid the names of actual residents in Corsica, and I apologize in advance for any failure which may be noted. There is a British Consul in Ajaccio but he is in no way the prototype of Hugh Cardinal.

Two critics of *The Inscrutable Lovers* noted that I endowed one of my characters with a name distinguished in Ireland. I am sorry that such is the case but I am also reminded of a story. An innocent prisoner, tried for forgery, was once faced with alternatives: he had either to go to prison or confess his inability to write. Prison is unpleasant; I think I shall sacrifice pride. Let me say, then, that I have been guilty only of ignorance. I had never heard of the gallant gentleman whose name my character bore!

I take this opportunity of thanking the following: His Majesty's Consul, Ajaccio; for a long talk under the moon-lit palms; Dr. F. J. Tanqueray, St. Andrews, for valuable introductions and advice; M. Jacques Stephanoli, Ajaccio, for general

A NOTE ON NAMES

information on Corsica; M. Anselme Costa, Vivario, my friend, whose gentle wisdom and patience with a foreigner I shall never cease to remember.

A. A. M.

St. Andrews,

February 20th, 1920.

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PART I
MABEL CAIN

THE CURTAIN

CHAPTER I

OUTSIDE THE ACTION

1

I SHALL always believe that events are subjective.

I once frequented a café in a garish Lancashire resort. There were, I remember, little iron tables set on a rotting wooden terrace which faced the sea, and I slowly won confidence from the minister who served these dismal altars; I ceased to be a phantom and became for him an individual, a fellow-creature with whom he might dare familiarity. He told me that he despised his trade and wanted to be an actor. This ambition he eventually realized. I saw him, two years later, in a provincial company touring Scotland, and he was playing the part of a waiter. I spoke with him after the performance and soon discovered that the rôle of waiter was his only one. He was very happy, however.

There is an instance of what I mean. It reminds me of another.

I was sitting on my balcony in a Paris hotel. The time was summer, the hour late. A black canopy dusted with gold was spread above me. The Boulevard Beaumarchais, lamp-lit and almost si-

lent, was far below. A young man appeared, followed by two women. One was of the streets, but the other, as far as I could judge, was of a gentler class; I fancy she was his wife. They both seemed absorbed with the object of their pursuit but not so absorbed that they failed to notice each other. I was beginning to wonder if a common interest were ever strong enough to reconcile natural antagonists, when the girl of the streets approached and addressed the man. He emphatically shook his head and gently withdrew the arm on which she had placed a hand. She tilted her head as she fell back and I had a glimpse of an unwholesomely white face dumb with misery; she had probably followed him far and counted too rashly on his decision. The other woman meanwhile hurried to his side. Her face too I glimpsed as the pair turned away and it seemed radiant with triumph. Sorrow and joy had been inspired by the one event.

There is my other instance. These two anecdotes have led my thoughts to a third. It is so long that many weeks must pass before I complete it.

I knew a woman who won and thus lost. I have a friend who lost and thus won. There is, to complicate the paradox, a second woman in my story who came to her own unexpectedly. She dreamt neither of profit nor of loss; she simply regarded her own insignificance as inevitable. She was, at the most, but a spectator like myself, a distracted spectator, apprehensive but impotent, of terrible things happening to a favourite hero on a stage be-

yond her reach. I think she must at first have been more shocked than happy, when the drama suddenly, as it were, turned and snatched her up from the stalls. Well, I am not inclined to be contemptuous. She had much in common with a woman of history, one who first sang the *Nunc Dimittis*. . . .

We dwell alone in little houses and spend our time looking from our window, perhaps at the house opposite. We need not be ashamed, for our neighbour there is watching us too. Life may leave us untouched so to amuse ourselves. A servant, however, sometimes passes down the street and draws the curtain of our window and of our neighbour's. What are the consequences? Our world may be tragically restricted; we may find nothing left but darkness and chagrin. Our neighbour may, on the other hand, find a brighter and livelier world within his own house; he may, too, learn more by the sound of our voice than he ever learnt by the sight of our house, by the deceptive glimpse of some one behind its window.

2

I should say that the most necessary equipment of an author is an eye for the incongruous. He must be able to see men and women, not as convention sees them, but as they really are. His state of mind must always be receptive.

I have for years cultivated such a state and have thus learnt to perceive contrasts quickly. The incongruous things in life start from their environ-

ment and stand before me, solitary, silent but insistent. Two people, Hugh Cardinal and his secretary, thus attracted me, while I was in Corsica writing a book. I found them interesting. Hugh was an old friend, British Consul at Bastia, and my presence in Corsica was due wholly to chance phrases in his irregular letters; these had fired my imagination. His secretary, Miss Gay, I had never before met. I had of course heard that he employed a secretary and had gently pulled his leg on the subject. The importance of his office did not justify the extravagance.

Hugh Cardinal in his twenty-ninth year was tall, loosely built and indolent. His still face, long and clean-shaven, was rather grey, for his heart was weak. He had a tragic chin of which, I am inclined to think, he was conscious. His eyes were full of a mocking spirit which sometimes left them cold and full of curiosity; they were brutally candid then. He had many deliberate affectations. He exaggerated the cynicism which was natural to him and often spoke with a bluntness that shocked the listener. A disreputable felt hat, which he slouched far over his forehead, added to his air of decadence. He appeared to live principally on Algerian cigarettes. These he held between the first and second fingers of his right hand, which were in consequence dyed a bright orange. His left arm had failed to develop. It began well at the shoulder but shrivelled and tapered till it ended in a hand little larger than a baby's. Most people,

conceal their feelings as they might, found this deformity repulsive. I am convinced that the misfortune had embittered Hugh, but he took pleasure in exhibiting it.

Miss Gay was incredible as secretary to such a man. She was incredible in Corsica. You must imagine a tall, gentle creature with honest eyes and patient features. The latter might be qualified by a second adjective alliterative with the first. You could not quarrel with that adjective, for the charitable and the spiteful alike used it; the former spoke of her as "a plain girl," the latter as "a plain spinster." You could not quarrel even with the noun, for Miss Gay was thirty-three years old. She was too slender to be wholly graceful. She flushed easily, for she was over-sensitive. Her voice, soft and pretty, showed that she was Scottish. Her father had been Hugh's predecessor. Her mother and she had settled on the island after Mr. Gay's death.

The Consulate occupied one room of a low-roofed villa above the Quartier des Capanelles, which is on the northwestern outskirts of the town. This villa was Hugh's home. Miss Gay lived, nominally in the hills with her mother, actually with a most respectable Corsican lady whose husband had held minor office in the Sous-Prefecture. Miss Gay daily walked to-and from the Consulate. Her duties were monotonous but light. Hugh's were even lighter. I have never indeed been able to understand why a British Consul should be sent to

such a wild spot. There are few tourists in Corsica, and the ships which trade with the island are mostly French or Italian. Bastia, when I knew it, none the less contained a British, an Italian, a Spanish and a Peruvian Consulate.

Hugh was of mixed family. His father, Justice Cardinal, had eccentrically married for the first time at the age of sixty-eight. Some may yet remember the judge who testily demanded of a prisoner:

“Why didn’t you strike harder? Murder is so much more amusing than assault.”

His mother was an actress who had no special beauty and no position in her profession. Both parents, however, were dead. One relative alone survived; an uncle named Lionel McBain, brother of the actress. He played leading parts in the No. 1 touring companies of musical comedies and was, I understand, the darling of all schoolgirls within a twenty-mile radius of his theatre. Hugh rarely spoke of him. You gathered, however, that Lionel McBain did much for his nephew. His salary must certainly have afforded him ample opportunity.

Miss Gay’s ancestors were all Scottish. There was nothing remarkable about them. Her branch of the family had steadily risen from small farmers to ministers, doctors, solicitors, advocates. The consulship of her father was the supreme assertion of the family’s “grandness” and perhaps the last. Self-made families behave like that. They rise to

a certain height and then either rapidly revert to type or become extinct. The latter fate seemed in this case inevitable. Miss Gay's was not the face to attract lovers' eyes. Her matrimonial chances were rendered doubly poor by her environment. Physical charm perforce counts for much in a southern climate.

Work at the Consulate began about ten in the morning. Miss Gay would then arrive, unpin her hat, meekly sit down to whatever letters might need attention. There was no mirror in the room and she never requested one. The fact is, I think, very suggestive of her character. Hugh would appear at eleven. He would be wearing a brown dressing-gown so ample that you could only guess what was lacking beneath. His face would be tragic, his eyes bright. Great hollows would form in his cheeks as he slowly inhaled the inevitable Algerian cigarette. You would suppose, if only from his dishevelled hair, that he had risen straight from a wild night of excess, but those of us who knew him knew better. He had probably retired not later than midnight after one glass of the white claret which he made from his own grapes.

I have now given some idea of Hugh's life on that perfumed island which is only a name to most of us, but I am not yet satisfied that I have dealt fairly with his character. Words are jack-o'-lanterns which lure an author further than he first intends. Deeds are better. A man may reveal as much by a minute's action as by an hour's sermon.

I shall complete with two reminiscences my sketch of a unique personality.

Hugh and I were contemporaries at a public school in the south of England. A fashionable "Seminary for the Daughters of Gentlemen" flourished in the same town. Its principal, Miss Renton Blake, sometimes visited our headmaster. She was a loud-voiced lady of excellent family but mean conventions. Hugh began to hate her because of her unlucky boast that "the girls of St. Aidan's all married within three years of their majority." He longed to humiliate Miss Renton Blake, and a summer holiday spent in the north of France gave him the chance he sought. He took me to a joiner's yard on the third half-holiday of the new term. The yard was disused and we made our entry over a rotting paling. Hugh then exhibited with pride a huge board four feet by three. I read an inscription in scarlet letters:

MAISON TOLÉRÉE.
ENTREPRISE
MISS RENTON BLAKE.

The jest was wasted on me for I had not yet visited France. I sniggered, however, and pretended to understand. Hugh must have managed to slip from his cubicle that night, for dawn discovered the gates of St. Aidan's adorned with that disreputable notice. The town roared, St. Aidan's was discreetly mentioned on the stage of the local music-hall, a socialist lecturer dealt with the notice seriously and Hugh was never found out. I

think, however, that our school was suspected, for Miss Renton Blake did not visit it in future.

I well remember Hugh's first bank-account. He treated it lightly but was secretly very proud. We were both resident at the same London crammer's. Hugh was preparing for the Civil Service Examination, while I was reading, with the Indian Army as a vague objective; I had not yet decided for the difficult career of letters. Hugh bought a dog from a pimpled contemporary and found he had no spare cash for payment.

"I'll write you a cheque," he said grandly.

He sat down, spread his elbows deliberately, produced a fountain-pen and a long yellow cheque-book. He was about to write his first cheque! We gathered round the table and watched him. The shrivelled hand with which he steadied the paper was cruelly conspicuous. He conscientiously filled the blanks:

"Harold Turnbull Esq. . . . Three Pounds, three Shillings . . . £3.3.0." He paused.

Nothing was lacking but his signature. This apparently gave him trouble, for he considered the table with a quiet scornful expression. He suddenly made up his mind and finished rapidly:

"Yours sincerely, Hugh F. Cardinal."

We laughed till we wept. Hugh dashed his pen upon the carpet and sprang to his feet. His jaw trembled, his eyes were bright and indignant.

"What the hell are you laughing at?" he demanded, in a hollow voice that shook with passion.

Some one explained, but Hugh was deaf to reason. He went on:

"You're all cads, that's what you are." His voice grew shrill. "Cads."

He faced us wildly. There fell a dreadful silence. Events had carried us so swiftly from the comic to the tragic that we were breathless. Hugh collapsed before any one spoke. He sat down, wrote feverishly, ripped a cheque from his book, surveyed us and said quietly:

"You know I can't stand chaff because of this."

He stretched out his left hand. Turnbull hurriedly picked up the cheque and withdrew. I believe Hugh would then have revealed himself, but the scene had left him inarticulate. It ended with a tutor's entry.

Of Miss Gay I have at present but one reminiscence. This seems to exhibit, not her character, but the fact that she was absent-minded. I hope I have given no impression that she was socially despised. The reverse is true. Social distinctions in Corsica, though well defined, are different from those in England. A secretary or a governess may have a better position than a wealthy woman of no breeding. Miss Gay was inevitably despised as a spinster but she had a place, and an honourable one, at every gathering of distinction in the island. Many might speak of her as a "nun" or a "man-huntress" (*attrape-nigaud*). All regarded her as a lady.

I visited the Consulate on a certain occasion to

find that Hugh was not yet awake. I went to the office, a long room, very shady, and sat at the farther end. The room was empty, but two hats, Miss Gay's and Hugh's, were hanging on pegs beside the door. Miss Gay presently came in, sadly regarded her table, arranged a strand of hair which was tickling her ear. She then very deliberately lifted Hugh's hat and placed it on her head! I realized for the first time that she had not noticed me and that no one had told her of my presence. I rose in a hurry.

"Miss Gay!" I began. "Hugh's hat . . ."

We advanced. She removed the hat and nervously held it behind her with both hands. I laughed in the end. She laughed too.

"It was Mr. Cardinal's," she said gently.

"And you thought it was yours?" I laughed again.

She lowered her eyes, and her sensitive lips quivered as though some one had hurt her.

"I often make that mistake." She hesitated. "Mr. Broom!" Her voice was husky. She suddenly looked me full in the face. Her eyes shone with emotion, her cheeks were red. "Don't tell Mr. Cardinal, if you please."

I at once promised. She went on:

"You see, he mightn't understand, might he? I think he would think that . . . I thought . . ." She grew more embarrassed as she realized the mess she was making of the sentence.

"He might think you were careless, you mean?"

She assented with an eagerness that was child-like:

“Yes. And I shouldn’t care to give up my work here.”

She took down her own hat, replaced Hugh’s and went out.

“It just shows!” I murmured.

I meant that Miss Gay was the last person I should have suspected of absence of mind.

CHAPTER II

MABEL CAIN'S PASSPORT

1

MY story proper begins with Mabel Cain. Her chance action set affairs in motion. She played the violin in a café orchestra. The Café Vivaldi in the Boulevard Paoli was respectable, so her environment was no danger to her reputation. She was the daughter of an English musician who had married a Frenchwoman, and she had been born and brought up in the south. She rented an apartment in a forbidding barracks overlooking the railway station. Her great misfortune was her blindness.

She was not more than twenty at the time of which I am writing, and she had two distinct personalities. She would sometimes appear with her brown hair, soft and exuberant, in a plaited rope which hung to her waist. You then regarded her as a flapper, daring, vivacious, provocative of a wish to protect. She would at other times coil her hair neatly and affect a shabby blue skirt which ended below her knees; her legs were laced in high leather boots. You then regarded her as a very engaging young woman, eager, candid, reproachful,

not too saintly. Her eyes were never dim despite her infirmity. She was always handsome, pensive and sentimental. It is true that a close scrutiny shook your belief in her strength of will. Her face was that of a picture-postcard girl with "I am thinking of you" printed on a scroll beneath.

I shall confess that the Café Vivaldi would not have sold me many books had it not been for Mabel Cain. Let there be no mistake. I was neither in love with her nor in danger of becoming so. The admiration I entertained was grudging. I went to the Café Vivaldi as I should have gone to any gallery where there was a clever portrait of a questionable face. I was, too, intrigued by the novelty of watching a blind violinist; I suppose we are all morbid at heart. Corsica was to me a workshop. I was visiting it only for a purpose and I never forgot the fact. I could not, however, write incessantly and — the Café Vivaldi was convenient in my spare time.

I was sorry for Mabel Cain. She might look as candid as she pleased but she could not conceal the truth: she was anybody's girl. The few Americans in Bastia had a vile jest. They spoke about "raising Cain." Their task was anything but difficult. There would be a sentimental walk in the Place St. Nicolas, a long kiss under the bewildering moon, a patch of darkness where the feathered palm trees rustled; I leave the rest to imagination. She was not mercenary; she received nothing for what she gave. She was yet very indiscreet. Her blind-

ness perhaps made her so; she could not realize that others had eyes and used them.

Why did she behave so badly? I am convinced that she was merely docile. She never lost her head but she had no strong opinions. She was too accommodating; it was easier to grant than to deny. I should have mentioned that she successfully deceived one person — herself. Nothing would induce her to contemplate her own actions. She would feign innocence to a man who had had ample proof of her knowledge. Each adventure was thus, as it were, a fresh experience. She came to it, not as a woman of the world, but as a young bride passionate for the first time.

2

I was staying at the Cynos-Palace Hotel, a self-contained solid building with many windows. I was sitting on the terrace, which faced the Place St. Nicolas, when a lithe boy glided from a window and approached me. He informed me in his liquid southern French that “Ma’m’selle Cain of the Café Vivaldi, she desired to see me.”

I was startled.

“Now?”

“Yes, M’sieur.”

“Cause Ma’m’selle to enter.”

He disappeared. I sat up, arranged my tie, compressed my lips, lifted my eye-brows in resignation. Reason bade me see her. A refusal meant that I

should be waylaid in the Place, to the entertainment of my acquaintances. But what could she want? She must have heard that I often visited her café. No doubt. I had not, however, spoken to her.

She was with me before I had time for reflection. She carried no stick. Her hands were lightly extended. The tips of her sensitive fingers no more than touched the sides of the window as she passed through. Hesitation suited her.

I hastily rose and went to her.

"Ma'm'selle will permit me to help her?" I asked.

She protested with a pout:

"Don't talk French to me. I'm English."

I murmured that I had forgotten. She gave me her left hand and allowed me to guide her to a basket chair. I sat down too. The terrace was transformed by a disturbing presence, feminine, trustful, mysterious. The perfume of her hair was dangerous; she herself was like a dangerous perfume, I decided. I grimly fought an inclination to regard her as a beautiful child, to regard myself as a grave protective veteran. Disaster lurked in such a theory.

"It's lovely today, isn't it?" she said brightly.

I wondered what possible difference sunshine could make to her darkness. She must have guessed what I was thinking, for she went on:

"Don't be frightened of me. That doesn't do at all. Of course you know I'm blind; everybody

does. Well. Why shouldn't you speak about it? I don't mind speaking of things. I'm not that sort of girl. I'm awfully sensible."

She was so manifestly the reverse that I almost laughed. I could not resist saying:

"You don't care for romances?"

She blushed and laughed in confusion.

"Now you're being horrid. I don't know what you mean." Her manner changed. She went on with an air of intelligence.

"Tell me, do you like my music?"

I could only assure her that I did.

"Father taught me before he died." Her lips trembled. She was for the moment irresistible. "Of course I was always quick at picking up things." She again grew cheerful. "He would play a note and I would copy it till I got it right. I had a good ear, you see. My eyes worried him more than they did me. He said they used to be so bright."

"They are still."

She smiled quickly but did not speak. I went on:

"You weren't always . . . blind?"

"Almost always. I can't remember seeing. I'll tell you how it happened, if you like." She settled herself confidently. "I had a kitten. Such a dear! Well. The kitten grew into a cat, and one day while I was playing on the floor, it scratched my face. I was just two at the time. Poor kitty! I'm afraid I must have pulled its tail.

My eyes were both injured and I gradually became blind."

What was the use of looking concerned? She could not see. I did what most men would have done; I put out my hand and pressed hers. She gratefully squeezed my fingers, withdrew her hand and placed it in her lap.

"You know, Mr. Broom, I've heard all about you," she murmured.

"Have you?"

"Yes. You write books. I wish I could read them!"

An author has his vanities. I told her that I only wished my public were as sympathetic as she.

"But you don't always write books." She turned her face directly towards me. I noticed her clear complexion faintly browned by the sun. I did not understand her remark.

"No," she went on. "You sometimes come to the Café Vivaldi, don't you?"

"Well, the beer is good."

She broke into laughter. It was so honest, so infectious, that I laughed too.

I pulled up sharply. The interview was becoming a flirtation. I was not in a drawing-room with a pretty school-girl. I deliberately averted my eyes. The dusty Place glittered beneath the sun. Thirsty palm-trees drooped their leaves. The red paint of the kiosk in the centre had blistered. The only undaunted object was the stone statue of Napoleon.

I drew a deep breath and returned to my guest. The tropical scene had restored my sense of values.

"Miss Cain," I began. She interrupted:

"Yes. My name's Mabel Cain."

"Well, Miss Cain. Is there some service you think I can do for you?"

She nodded.

"What is it?"

"It seems awful coming to a stranger like this," she said after a pause.

There was another pause.

"Well," she suddenly began. "I'd better explain. I have a girl-friend named Constance Jenkins. English too. She has nice work in a lady's orchestra at Cagliari. In Sardinia, you know."

I nodded, then remembered that she could not see.

"Yes," I said. "I know. Go on, please."

"Well, Connie thinks I should join her. There's a vacancy, she says. At least, perhaps. I'm not happy at the Café here. I'm often lonely. And some of the men are horrid. I believe I should like Sardinia. The Italian fellows are nicer than the French—ever so much! And then Connie . . . I only got her letter this morning. I kept it in my blouse till this afternoon. Till I had time to take it to M'sieur Benoît at the Bureau des Postes. He's lived in London. He reads all my English letters to me. And then I came straight to you."

She seemed to expect a remark.

"How can I help?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Easily. You know Mr. Cardinal. He's awfully nice, of course. His father was a judge, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"And the son of a lord?"

"I believe so."

"A Consul often has a very good position. He's under the Foreign Office?"

I laughed and replied:

"Cardinal would tell you that he was — for his sins."

She laughed too.

"Mr. Cardinal makes lots of jokes, doesn't he? I mean I've heard that he does. I don't know him personally."

"Well —"

"Well, I should be afraid he made one of his jokes with me."

"I'm sure he wouldn't."

"You can't be sure. I knew a boy who played the flute here. Pierre Propriano. Did you know him?"

"Never."

"He was offered work in England at a London music-hall. Pierre was a stupid boy. We used to laugh at him. He spoke down in his throat as though he were always eating a chocolate, and they told me that he was thin and had long sticky hair. But he was very proud of his appearance. Well. He took his passport to Mr. Cardinal to have it

visaed before starting for England. And what do you think Mr. Cardinal did? There was a blank space on the passport beside Pierre's photograph, meant for the photograph of his wife, if he had one. Mr. Cardinal pasted a woman's photograph in the blank. It was the photo of a huge negress who was wanting to go to Malta."

It was the first I had heard of the incident but I could well believe it. I reflected that if Hugh indulged humour of this sort, he would not long be consul in Bastia. Mabel Cain again read my thoughts. I suppose the blind are always specially gifted, for Providence never fails to compensate.

"It was all right," she assured me. "Mr. Cardinal got into no trouble. The photo was soon removed. You've met his secretary, Miss Gay? She apologized to Pierre, and settled the matter with a pen-knife and some warm water."

Just what Miss Gay would do, I thought. The business of the consulate might be trivial. It yet could not go on without her. Miss Gay invaluable! It was amusing to think of her in this light. . . .

Mabel Cain interrupted my thoughts.

"I want you . . . that is, I shall really be grateful . . ."

I looked at her. She showed signs of nervousness. She had bent her head till her chin touched her chest. A phrase occurred to me: "The glory of a woman is her hair." Mabel Cain undoubtedly triumphed if you judged her by this criterion. I

was hurt by the sight of that superb crown bowed in embarrassment.

"Yes?" I said gently.

She raised her head and smiled eagerly.

"Will you take me to Mr. Cardinal and get me my passport to Sardinia?"

I reflected. "If I do not receive her now, I shall be waylaid in the Place, to the entertainment of my friends." Yes. I know I had harboured the thought but a half-hour previously. Much, however, can happen in half-an-hour. I had by this time become reckless. I was capable of escorting Mabel to the wooden chairs which cluster in the Place when the band is playing; family parties only, gather there! I was on the point of rising when I remembered an engagement which offered a way of escape.

"I don't need to take you," I replied. "If you wait here, Cardinal will be with us presently."

3

I had forgotten that I expected him! He had told me that morning of a threatened visit from Signor Grimaldi, the Italian consul. Hugh could not bear Signor Grimaldi.

"I can't think of a big lie," he had explained, "and I hate the nasty little stories women tell when they don't want callers. If you'll have me, I'll just turn up at your hotel at the hour of *fif-o'clock*. And I won't leave a message for Grimaldi. He can go to hell when he arrives — or to Miss Gay."

This speech was very characteristic of Hugh. I had invited him to "come by all means." Mabel Cain's unexpected visit had made me forget the appointment. My struggle with reason and inclination had reminded me. I was certain that I ought not to escort Mabel. I was equally certain that it would be very churlish to refuse. I now told myself that reason and inclination were satisfied. A chat in the hotel would be harmless to me and effective for Mabel Cain.

Another motive swayed me. A certain pleasure, perhaps malicious, was to be expected from the meeting of Hugh with Mabel. She would want him to accompany her to the Consulate. This I was positive he would not do. He appeared to loathe women and he had probably heard of Mabel. The distinction conferred by her company was not one which he craved. How could he refuse? He was sensitive for the feelings of helpless creatures, so I knew he would refrain from insulting her. Desperation would evoke the "big lie." I should secretly enjoy its magnitude. . . .

Mabel Cain thanked me with simplicity. She settled herself more confidently than ever. Her hands rested in her lap. One of her legs was doubled beneath her chair. The other, unskirted from the knee, she extended with the unconsciousness of a child. Her hair was up. Her breasts rounded her cream blouse, low at the neck, and edged with delicate lace. The elder of her personalities was today more prominent.

She made no attempt to recapture the spirit of flirtation. Our conversation would have done credit to the average drawing-room. She might be superficial but she was clever at hiding the fact. Her range of subjects was interesting — remarkable for one so handicapped. She skilfully passed to another as fast as she exhausted one. We at length reached that of dances. Of the latter she knew more than I; she was on her own ground and had decisive views.

“I love all music if it makes you laugh or cry,” she said. “But dancing is different. I suppose it’s healthy, good for the body. And I like playing at a ball. I don’t mind then what I play, but if I was a guest I should very much mind what I danced. Waltzes would be perfect, of course. And lancers! Well, you know, a romp is sometimes fun. But tangoes and jazes and bunny-hugs — all that rag-time stuff. Well. You’ll say I’m awfully old-fashioned, but I don’t think they’re nice. I really don’t!”

I reflected that they were at least “nicer” than certain exercises I could name. I said nothing, however, for I was studying her. She presently went on:

“The Consuls’ Ball is late this year.”

The function was an annual one usually held in June. The representatives of the different Powers united on this occasion to repay the hospitality of the people on whose island they dwelt. The result was a night of splendour with an aftermath of

grievances from those who had not been invited. The four consuls were hosts in turn. Señor Don Comez de la Barca (of Peru) was the host of that year. His habit of procrastination had led to the Ball's postponement. Invitations, however, were now being issued for the first week of July. The date was unlucky, for the hottest season would be beginning.

I was still explaining matters when I saw Hugh's hat above the strip of paling which separated the hotel garden from the Place. Hugh appeared a moment later. He had climbed directly to the terrace without passing through the hotel. His manner was festive. It changed, however, as he saw I was not alone. He stood and regarded me inimically.

"Hullo!" he said.

I beckoned him forward and felt I was going to enjoy myself. He came reluctantly. I glanced at Mabel Cain. Her head was averted. Her chin rested on her hand, and her elbow on her knee. She seemed in a reverie.

I touched her arm and said:

"Here's Mr. Cardinal. Hugh, this is Miss Cain of the Café Vivaldi."

She lowered her arm, leisurely turned, stretched out her hand, but did not rise. Hugh was compelled to shake hands with her. She smiled frankly. Hugh was too slow in releasing her hand, but he was always awkward with women. He did not move. His gloomy eyes searched her up and

down. She was still smiling expectantly. The fact seemed to puzzle him, and it suddenly occurred to me that he did not know of her misfortune.

"Miss Cain is blind," I quietly put in.

I never saw a man more shockingly affected. He started violently. His face twitched. His wits were scattered and he forgot to be cool and indifferent.

I thought his heart had given him a turn. I was so alarmed that I gripped the sides of my basket chair. He stepped back a pace and seemed on the point of leaving. He suddenly recovered, drew up a chair, sat down beside Mabel. He bent towards her and said slowly:

"I've been rude. I stared at you."

She laughed.

"You mustn't trouble about that. Anyhow, I couldn't see you."

His voice rose to a scream.

"But that's the *point*! You can't see! That's where I've been beastly!" His nerves appeared shattered.

"Miss Cain doesn't mind," I assured him.

He cast me a bitter glance. I gathered he was offended because I had not explained matters sooner. Well. I had had experience of his black moods.

He returned to Mabel Cain.

"What a horrible shame! I am rather bad at saying things, Miss Cain, but I hope you'll accept

my sympathy. You can believe that I'm sincere because I'm a fellow-sufferer. I'm not blind, but my left hand is dwarfish, deformed and horrible." He pronounced the adjectives deliberately as though he challenged criticism. It was as if he had said: "Such I am. Take me or leave me. I scorn euphemism."

"Really?" she murmured.

"Yes."

"Does it make you sad, Mr. Cardinal?"

"Sometimes. I'd rather not speak of it, if you don't mind. I'd feel a cad if I did. My misfortune is very paltry beside yours."

I noticed that she treated him differently to me: she did not make light of her trouble. She was silent for a full minute and then raised her head. Her lips parted, her cheeks flushed. She seemed to have triumphed. How? I could not guess. She began rapidly:

"Don't let's be mournful, Mr. Cardinal! I believe in Shakspeare, now. 'The world is so full of such wonderful things, I think we should all be as happy as kings.'"

Hugh interrupted:

"You know, you're wonderful."

I forebore to point out that she was quoting, not Shakspeare, but Stevenson. I was amazed. Hugh had never before been so civil to a woman. I was, too, disappointed. I had anticipated the clash of temperaments but was being soothed instead with

a mixture of milk and honey. I was, most of all, angry. My anger is inexplicable unless men are more jealous than is supposed.

"We'd better have tea," I said roughly.

Mabel Cain made a fantastic announcement:

"Oh, I'd sooner have *crème-de-menthe*, if you don't mind!"

I suppose my silence was noticeable. She grew distressed, at all events, glided to her feet, appealingly stretched out her hands. The figure she made was very pretty.

"Oh, heavens! What have I said?" she cried. "Mr. Broom, you'll think I'm awful!" She considered rapidly. "Mr. Broom, I was only joking. Honest In — I mean, honestly! Honestly I was only joking."

Hugh turned on me savagely.

"Why shouldn't she have *crème-de-menthe* if she wants it? You're confoundedly rude! I was going to ask for it myself."

She sighed, sat down again, turned to Hugh.

"Really?"

"Really. I never drink anything else at this time. It's doctor's orders. Ask Aubrey, there. He'll tell you."

I was astounded. The "big lie" had come with a vengeance. I muttered something vague but assuring.

"There you are," said Hugh. He again addressed me.

“Two *crème-de-menthes* and one tea for yourself — if you can stand the cabbage-water they give you here.”

I stepped to a window and cried:

“Waiter!”

Mabel Cain called after me:

“Please! Tea for me too!”

I had no time to reply, for a breathless waiter appeared. He was a fine manly fellow. His unflinching eyes, healthy skin and spruce moustache ill accorded with his part in life. He said:

“Yes, m’sieur!”

“Ma’m’selle and I, we shall now take the *five o’clock*. M’sieur desires a large glass of *crème-de-menthe*.”

One for Hugh, I thought grimly. He had said he wanted *crème-de-menthe*. Very well. He should have it. I was not to know that Mabel Cain’s plans might have altered his.

The waiter was perfect. My order must have shocked his French soul but he went off without as much as quivering. I rejoined my guests and sat down.

“Miss Cain,” I said, “wants to go to Sardinia. She came to ask if I would introduce her to you. I told her I was expecting you today.” I was determined to force the interview to the level of the commonplace.

Hugh fixed his melancholy eyes on Mabel but quickly averted them. Something at his side in-

terested him and he presently stooped, raised a butterfly, tenderly placed it in a patch of sunshine. He at length said:

“You want to go to Sardinia?”

“Well, yes, Mr. Cardinal.”

“Perhaps that butterfly wanted to go to Sardinia.”

She looked interested. I am convinced, however, that she did not understand. Hugh went on:

“But it only blundered into the shadow — Oh, I beg pardon, Miss Cain! I forgot! I’m a rotten ass. I always put my foot in it.”

“No, you don’t.”

He said after a silence:

“Why do you want to go?”

“To Sardinia? Well, I have a girl-friend there. In Cagliari. She wants me to join her. I’m not anxious but I think she’s lonely.”

I nearly interrupted. She had told me that she “wasn’t happy” at the Café Vivaldi because the men were “horrid”!

Hugh became judicial.

“You shouldn’t bother about people. It doesn’t pay, in my experience.”

“But you’re bothering about me! At least, I hope you are.”

“I don’t expect payment.”

“You’re awfully kind, Mr. Cardinal.”

Hugh considered the statement. He suddenly lit a cigarette with a great air of purpose. I had been marvelling at his abstinence.

The shutters of a window flew back, and the waiter appeared. He was carrying a shallow tray of naked iron. It bore a dull metal tea-pot, a pair of large folded napkins, two cups, two saucers, tea-spoons and a claret-glass; the last was brimming with a dangerous dark-green liquid.

The waiter balanced the tray on his left palm and deftly transferred its contents one by one to a table. He disappeared in silence.

Hugh pessimistically regarded his glass. He must have felt that my eye was on him, for he suddenly drained it. He flung away his cigarette with a gesture of irritation, but almost at once lit a second.

"Miss Cain," he began. He broke off wildly. "There's no privacy in this cursed place!"

The waiter was responsible for the outburst. He had reappeared with his tray. It now bore two metal knives and three china plates; one of these was loaded with four repulsive fragments of bread-and-butter. The waiter made space for his fresh contributions and left as before.

Hugh drew deeply at his cigarette. The waiter appeared for the third time as I was lifting the tea-pot. His manner was now distraught. He carried in his right hand a cream-jug and in his left a saucer with four lumps of sugar. These he deposited beside me.

Hugh fretted till the waiter's steps had died away.

He then said:

"Who would have thought that fellow was so susceptible? My fatal beauty!"

Mabel Cain laughed till she was exhausted. There was then a pause. I seized the opportunity of asking:

"Cream?"

"Yes, please."

"Sugar?"

"Oh, lots, please!"

I placed three of the lumps in a cup and poured cream on top of them. I filled the cup with tea, and bending forward placed it before Mabel Cain.

Hugh had apparently recovered his temper. He leant back, lazily blew a grey cloud, said in a deep voice:

"So you are thinking of going to Sardinia?"

"Yes."

"And you want me to give you a passport?"

"If you please." She sipped her tea.

I drew her attention to the plate of bread I was offering, but she shook her head.

"Let me see!" Hugh continued. "Where were you born?"

"In Nice."

"But then you're French!"

She pouted as she had done with me.

"I'm not. I'm English."

Hugh was remarkably patient, I thought. He looked regretful and blew another cloud.

"You're English," he at length told her. "But

the law won't admit it. In the eyes of the law, you're French because, you see, you were born in France."

"The law's a stupid one."

"All laws are." He paused. "That doesn't help us. I can't give you a passport."

She murmured her vexation. He went on:

"In fact, I can't help you at all. I'm sorry. You'd better go to the Sous-Préfecture."

"May I use your name?"

He considered.

"You can say, if you like, that the Consul Anglais sent you. I don't advise it. They think I'm mad, and they hate me. Most people do." He made the announcement calmly and appeared to enjoy it.

"Well, I'm really at a loss," she murmured.

He pitched his cigarette into the garden, straightened his shoulders and coughed.

"These Algerian things are getting terrible," he declared. He coughed again, pulled a grimace, thrust out his chin in a reckless little smile. "You can't stay here, I suppose?"

She quickly faced him.

"I'd like to. Awfully. But there's the question of finance. I'm not an independent girl. I've got to work. And then I'm ambitious. I don't want always to be employed. And then M'sieur Vivaldi's very decent but he doesn't pay me well; he can't afford it, poor thing! And then . . . people don't think I'm nice because I play in a café. Do they?"

Her voice grew wistful. She seemed of a sudden to be pleading for fair treatment.

Hugh was indignant.

"People be — I mean to say, what the deuce do people matter? I'd rather see a girl working honestly than sticky with paint and trying to catch a husband."

"It's good of you to say that," she put in.

"No, it isn't good. I'm not good. . . . Look here! I've never properly gathered what you do. Aubrey's an idiot at explaining." He threw me another glance. I supposed he was now revenging himself for that glass of *crème-de-menthe*. "You're a musician, aren't you?"

"I play the fiddle."

"Well, Comez is looking for musicians just now. There's a beastly function coming off soon. The Consuls' Ball. I daresay you haven't heard of it."

She said staidly:

"Mr. Broom mentioned it just before you came."

"More tea, Miss Cain?" I tried to convey reproof but she seemed unconscious.

"Is there much sugar?"

"One piece."

"Then I shan't have any more tea, thanks."

She eagerly turned to Hugh: "Oh, I do feel excited! I should like to play at a ball. Do you think your friend —"

Hugh broke in:

"Good Lord! Comez isn't my friend."

She was slightly abashed. Hugh went on:

"He's the Peruvian consul. This dance, we take turns at running the thing. It's Comez's turn this year. That's all."

"Do you think he wants many instruments?"

"Heaps."

"I could play the fiddle well enough. I'm sure of that."

Hugh exploded for the second time.

"Good Lord! You don't suppose I'd send you to a job of that sort? It wouldn't be better than the one you're quitting. No. Wait a minute." He drew out a crumpled packet of cigarettes, awkwardly held it in his shrivelled hand. His right hand shook as he chose a cigarette. This he lit with an air of speculative gravity. "No," he repeated slowly. "I had something rather different in mind. What I thought was that you might be musical directress of the whole affair."

"Mr. Cardinal!" She stood up. Her face was white with suspense.

He smiled. A pleased expression settled on his face.

"Why not?" He deliberately flicked the ash from his cigarette. "You would be given a certain sum. You would engage the number of musicians that Comez wants. He'll probably want a great many. These South Americans are all spectacular. Then you could play yourself, if you liked. As leader of the whole collection. And afterwards . . ." He stopped. His eyes grew dark and reflective.

“Afterwards?”

“Well, if your company did well, you’d have made a certain reputation. You could keep them together and tour them about — your own company.”

“Mr. Cardinal, I . . . I don’t know what to say. I don’t!”

He looked at his watch and rose abruptly.

“Let’s go,” he said. “Comez will be in just now.”

Mabel Cain did not forget to thank me “for the nice tea.” Hugh did not look at me. He either bore me a grudge or was too busy with his protégée. He guided her down the steps with a solicitude that was unnecessary; she was used to walking alone.

I watched the pair as they crossed the Place. I was in hopes that Hugh might look back, but he did not do so. Their empty seats reproached me as I turned away. It was I who had brought them together.

CHAPTER III

THE CYRNOS-PALACE HOTEL

1

HUGH'S infatuation dated from this meeting. He escorted Mabel Cain to the villa of Don Comez. That was bad enough. Don Comez, I understand, was by no means ready to engage her. Hugh then made a scene; he was capable of threatening international complications! Don Comez finally yielded. This was still worse, for the whole town soon knew the reason of Mabel's appointment. Trust a Spaniard to avenge himself! Hugh might still, however, have escaped lasting notoriety. The south is tolerant. Every one, too, was accustomed to Hugh's eccentricities. He spoilt his chance by accompanying Mabel to and from her café. This was the final blow.

They were soon inseparable. My hope that the expiry of her contract with Vivaldi would end her affair with Hugh was disappointed. She merely saw more of him. Her time was now her own. She of course had to use it, was compelled to engage and rehearse an orchestra, but she could do her work when she pleased, and elected to do it in Hugh's company. He acted as her secretary, attended rehearsals, even drove her twenty miles to

a village in the hills; a wonderful 'cellist was said there to reside. He pushed indiscretion to extremes. A postman saw him mount to her apartment at the busiest hour of the day.

I spoke just now of "her affair." Every one naturally regarded it as such, and I was not an exception. I knew a little of her past and suspected more. Facts are supreme; they will in the end kill the strongest intuition, and facts led to an obvious conclusion. I was given a seasoned young man, a handsome and healthy girl. Neither were governed by ideals. One was of family, the other of the people, and the climate favoured romance. The situation was almost conventional.

One fact yet puzzled me. I could not picture Hugh as the hero of such an intrigue. Intuition played no part in my conviction. Facts again were insistent. I had known Hugh from boyhood.

I do not mean that I believed him incapable of sin. I should vouch for no man's chastity. I believe that thousands are chaste, but — you cannot always distinguish the sheep from the goats; life is too misty for that. I have known men of filthy tongue but spotless life. I have known saintly women who had strange memories locked in their hearts. . . .

I mean that Hugh's was not the mind to harbour a protracted intrigue.

He had always been fantastic, difficult, temperamental but not vicious. I had received the impression that he loathed women. Contemporaries

would talk very candidly of their conquests. Hugh gibed at them. Others would discuss marriage. They were young men. It was natural that marriage should loom large in their thoughts. Why should they not discuss it? Hugh coldly held aloof. He was obstinate and contrary. I could thus picture him in an irrational mood; he might sin as it were in revenge. He would not, however, sin sordidly, for there dwelt in him an elusive chivalry.

It appeared, however, that he was sinning. I could suppose only that he had changed. The weight of experience will often crush a blade of virtue. Friends usually disappoint us. I was disappointed in Hugh. I reflected bitterly that he was coarsening. He would perhaps grow plump and develop a satisfied chuckle, would guffaw at ideals instead of picturesquely denouncing them. I should still visit him. He would regale me with lechery, not with Rabelaisian wit.

He did not appear ashamed. He had grown graver and he looked older, but he remained indifferent to opinion. A few pleasure-seekers tried to be familiar; I suppose they thought he had joined their ranks. He soon put them in their place.

Mabel Cain was as fresh and honest as usual. She might easily have been mistaken for a tourist, a sister from England to whom Hugh was exhibiting the sights.

2

I tried to reason with him once. His life had considerably altered, but there was still a habit which he continued: he would not rise early. The awkwardness of an encounter with Mabel kept me from him at most times. His indolence, however, gave me an opportunity.

I left my hotel on the morning of the Ball. The light was already dazzling, the dusty Place sparkled but the sun was yet low. I blinked as I faced it. It was poised as a great flare over the lake-like sea. I could fancy I saw it moving, creeping up the horizon. Not a breath of wind was stirring. The smallest leaf seemed petrified, reality became unreal. I felt I was acting in a painted scene. The turquoise sky was like a concave dome of satin.

I turned north by the side of my hotel, up the Avenue Carnot, along a rutted cart-track. The hills were now before me. A verdant thicket clothed them; that was the *maquis*. They were sculptured in high relief. The emerald grass shimmered with a thousand cob-webs. Lithe lizards basked on the warm stones and reassuring sounds prevailed — the good-natured hum of bees, the chirp of sparrows, the possessive screaming of many swifts.

A high wall, ivy-clad, surrounded the Consulate. It was pierced by a wooden door with an iron handle suspended beside it. I pulled, and a bell jangled in the distance. I waited, and measured steps grew heavier. The door was cautiously opened. A

villainous man appeared, framed in the aperture. His name was Costa Pierangeli, and I knew him as Hugh's servant. His unshaven chin and gleaming teeth belied his character. He was upright and devoted. I think he would have died for Hugh. A beautiful smile lit his eyes as he recognized me. His knees bent, his bow was almost a salaam. He stood aside and swept his arm in invitation. I said:

"Good-day, Costa. M'sieur Cardinal is at home?"

He raised his eyes and held up his palms.

"But M'sieur the Consul is yet sleeping! I am desolated." He clasped his hands at his chest as though he were serving Mass. His last remark was no exaggeration. He looked desolated; his dark eyes were full of apprehension.

"I must see him. Important business."

I entered. He hastened to lock the door behind me. The long path to the house was canopied with vines. The scent of lilies was overpowering. I had reached the end of that cool avenue when Costa overtook me. He was breathless.

"But M'sieur the Consul is yet sleeping," he again expostulated.

"Oh, well! I shall wake him then. Do not trouble to accompany me."

I left him at the foot of the wooden steps which led to the verandah. I paused as I reached the latter, for a torn envelope lay on an iron table. The writing was not Hugh's. Three words of the

address caught my eye: "Mlle. Mabel Cain". . .

I bit my lip. Hugh had indeed become her secretary! She had once spoken of a "M. Benoît at the Bureau des Postes" who read her letters. M. Benoît had, it appeared, been relieved of his duties. I wondered how she had rewarded his gallantry. I wondered if she were rewarding Hugh's in the same fashion. Hugh as M. Benoît's successor! The idea was revolting.

I passed on. The trivial episode had stimulated my resolution. The front-door was open. I went in, crossed the shadowy hall, climbed the shallow staircase, did not hesitate at the top. I knew Hugh's room, so I braced my nerves and rapped at the door. There was silence. I rapped more insistently. There was another silence. A sleepy voice suddenly cried:

"Enter!"

I entered and closed the door. The shutters were fast. I could see nothing till my eyes grew accustomed to the olive light. I could then see but dimly.

A deep voice said in tragic French:

"Costa! In the name of the thousand devils, why dost thou knock? That's a new trick."

I remained silent. A long offensive yawn was followed by the remark:

"It surely isn't half-past-ten?"

I quickly crossed the room and opened the shutters. The window faced east. A blaze of glorious sunshine so flooded every corner that I involun-

tarily drew back. The light for a moment seemed living. It had been lurking on the balcony waiting the chance I had given.

The room was conventionally furnished. The ceiling was white. There was a brown wall-paper with a pink thread of flowers. The colours of the small carpet were neutral; cocoanut matting formed a wide border. There were no pictures and only necessary articles — washstand, wardrobe, so forth. Hugh was on his back in a camp-bed which projected beside the door.

He sat up as he recognized his visitor. I drew out my watch and answered his question deliberately:

“It’s a quarter-past-eight.”

“A quarter-past-eight?” His voice was incredulous. It was as though he had never believed in the reality of such an hour.

“Yes.” I put away my watch.

He moodily regarded me for some seconds.

“Look here!” he said abruptly. “What the hell are you doing in my room at a quarter-past-eight in the morning?”

“Well, I wanted to see you. And you’re a busy man now-a-days.”

“Busy!” He stared at me curiously. A yawn interrupted him. He recovered and went on: “Oh, go back! You ought to be in bed.”

I took a cigarette from a packet that was on the dressing-table.

“Give me one of those,” he interjected.

I obeyed, contriving that the one match should serve us both. The little action was a pathetic symbol of the amity I wished to establish between us. He puffed rapidly for a couple of minutes; then broke off.

"Who showed you up?"

"No one. I knew the way."

"What was Costa doing?"

"Trying to think of the politest refusal he could make me."

His lips quivered then tightened in the slow deep smile which was his charm. He thrust out his chin.

"I trained him, of course," he murmured.

I was greatly encouraged. He presently went on:

"Now you're here, I suppose you'd better sit down."

The invitation was for Hugh gracious. I was laying my hand on the back of a chair when he stopped me.

"I shouldn't advise that one. The leg's broken. Costa has been meaning to mend it for a year." He grew impatient. "See there! Take this one. Fling my trousers on the floor."

I folded them instead and doubled them over the towel-rail. Some time passed before he spoke.

"Well?" he said suddenly. "What's up?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing."

He inhaled deliberately.

"Rubbish! You want something. I'll visa your passport for Bengal, Beloochistan or the Isles of Bastardy. I won't go for a walk. I'll lend you anything to the amount of a hundred pounds. I won't listen to your book. Come on! Out with it! I see the lump sticking in your throat."

There may perhaps have been a lump in my throat. . . .

"Out with it!" he repeated.

"Hugh!"

"All right. I'm listening."

"I want to speak about Mabel Cain."

"I thought so." He threw back his head and luxuriously parted his lips. A thin column of smoke rose from them. "My dear young boys!" His earnestness was irresistible. He kept his countenance perfectly. "I would speak with you this lovely morning on the sins of the flesh. Such sins are repugnant to your grannies, your aunties and myself —"

"You're damnably rude!" I interrupted.

He ignored me.

"Therefore do not practise them, I beseech you. Terrible consequences will result. You do not know them, but I do, I do!"

I began to laugh. He stopped and slowly smiled his satisfaction. He became grave, propped himself on his palms, looked at me.

"What about Miss Cain?" he demanded.

"That's what I've come to find out. You're always with her."

"Am I?"

"I never thought you'd make a fool of yourself."

"Didn't you?"

"I feel responsible for the affair. I knew something of her reputation. Yet I brought you together."

He broke in:

"Look here! Are you trying to insinuate that Miss Cain's a bitch?"

He sat erect and looked at me more closely still. I was at a loss. His direct attack smashed my defences. I at length began:

"Hugh! You're not treating me fairly. You've used a hard word. A woman might be very foolish, very weak, and yet not deserve it. If I say 'No' you'll tell me I've got no right to object. If I say 'Yes'—

"If you say 'Yes'!" His voice trembled. His face grew white. "Good Lord! You're the most casual person I've ever met! You break into my house in the small hours! You lecture me on my morals as though you were my father! You take away a girl's reputation. A blind girl! A—a . . ." Words failed him. His voice had been gradually rising. "It's damnable!" he screamed. "It's damnable! The whole thing's monstrous. Get out of my house at once!"

I too could be angry. I too could raise my voice.

"No!" I shouted. "Not till you've heard me."

"I won't listen."

"You can insult me as much as you like." I rose. "It doesn't worry me — not twopence. I'll still say what I must. And if you won't listen I'll print it in the local paper. Or — or shout it in the Place St. Nicolas."

"What have you got to say?"

"Just this. You're playing the ass with a dangerous girl. And you haven't the slightest excuse. It's not temptation, for you were never disturbed by women. You've too much money. That's what's wrong! You've nothing to do, nowhere to spend it, so you think you'll pretend to be a profligate."

I stopped and defiantly awaited developments. I felt less triumphant than I seemed. He had grown contemplative. I thus found it difficult to realize that he was the object of my wrath. He was more like an expert critic listening to the rehearsal of an impassioned scene. He presently leant back and closed his eyes. There was nothing more to be said. I decided to leave and was half-way to the door when he stopped me.

"Come here."

I hesitated, then returned.

"Sit down on that chair and listen to me," he said, in a lazy voice.

I sat down. He opened his eyes. He had smoked his cigarette to a glowing stump, which perplexed him. He said fretfully:

"This cursed thing will burn me in a minute. Give me an ash-tray."

I gingerly lifted the stump from his yellow fingers. I could see no ash-tray, so I pitched it through the window; my aim was perfect. I wondered what was coming. A defence of pleasure? More sarcasm? A confession? I did not know. You could never be sure of Hugh. Did he really believe himself Mabel's first lover? It was hardly possible for he must have heard tales and noted the way in which men smiled as they spoke of her. Did he accept her past or was he merely trying to forget it?

His first words were surprising.

"What do you know about me?"

"Well, I've seen a great deal of you."

He smiled compassionately.

"That's nothing. You're tenant for life of your own mind, but you don't know yourself."

I had nothing to say. The justice of the charge was too obvious. He went on:

"You said just now that women never disturbed me. Well, if you want to know, they do. I was born with an eye for beauty. People think I'm a strong man. I'm not. I make them think so by posing. I loathe myself for it but I don't seem able to stop. I'm posing just now, but I'm telling you the truth all the same. Beautiful objects attract me, I forget everything except that they are beautiful. Women have often tempted me, but I'm repulsive to every one of them because of this horrible hand. Well. I'm devilishly proud. I won't buy their favours. And if I can't win them

I'm not going to let people know. By jove, I'm not! I pretend that I don't want them. But I'm always suffering without reason. A sunset makes me want to cry. And I'm always happy without reason. A gay crowd will make me lose my head. I tell you this country's worse than England; I'll go mad in it. Every object that I see in it affects me. It's like certain whiskies; it's too strong for me." He paused.

I was still tongue-tied. The revelation was bewildering. He began afresh:

"You said, too, that I had more money than was good for me. Well, I haven't. I get four hundred a year for being consul here and I've no other income. I'm not happy. I want to go back to England. My God! There are times when I'd give anything for a London fog! It's not the life of England that I want; it's just rest. How can I go back? I haven't a single relative except my uncle. I don't speak of him often because I don't want to curse him; he's my mother's brother. But he does nothing for me, never has done anything. He's paid I don't know how much, because flappers think him good-looking. Yet my expenses at school and in London were paid by twelve hundred pounds — all my father left, his insurance. That was done long ago. There are no jobs in England for a man like me — weak heart, freak hand, twisted temper — so I'm saving to retire. By living like a pauper I've saved a couple of hundred pounds; two hundred and thirteen pounds, eleven

shillings, to be exact. But how long will it take me to save enough to invest? Oh, it's mounting up, of course! But how long will it take? Tell me. To make enough to retire. That is the problem of my life." He stopped abruptly.

I was astonished by this second revelation. I forgot Mabel Cain, forgot that he had never mentioned her. I could only murmur:

"But, I say, Hugh! When will you be able to retire?"

"Two hundred and thirteen pounds, eleven shillings." His chin was defiant.

"Where will this end?"

He did not appear to have heard for he said in a hollow voice:

"I want a peaceful life." His eyes were again closed.

He suddenly opened them, jumped up, gripped my wrist and exclaimed:

"Look here! If you speak of this to any one I'll kill you!"

His theatrical threat closed the subject. Costa entered with a silver tray on which were a brown coffee-pot, a sugar-bowl, a cup and saucer, a plate and knife, some toast. It was time for the "little breakfast."

I said good-bye and left with a heavy heart. The sky was still bright, but it had ceased to charm me. I continued to grieve about Hugh, for my errand had proved fruitless.

The preparations for the Ball hurt me so I

dressed early and dined alone at a café. I lingered with my problems till the evening was far advanced. They still vexed me as I slowly returned to the hotel.

3

I was greeted by the sob of violins and the throbbing of a grand piano; the Ball was in progress. There was no one to receive me. A servant took my card of invitation and I passed at once to the ball-room. I was dazzled for a time by the brilliant lights and the gay colours. I caught a glimpse through the open windows of the cool terrace where in normal times I should have dined.

The floor was crowded. There were civilians in evening dress, officials with decorations, officers in blue uniforms, Corsican landowners in picturesque trousers and loose velvet coats. Most of the women tried to be Parisian. A few, however, were too unsophisticated or too strong minded. These wore primitive colours that suited their environment. I noticed one dark beauty in a white skirt, a cherry-coloured blouse and a sash of flaming orange! A tango was in progress. The soulless music, like the crash of brazen bells, filled the room, and my brain span; there is something barbaric in a tango. Erotic negresses might thus dance, but why, I wondered, should innocent girls imitate? I marvelled, not for the first time, at the world's inconsistency; it condones panderism but flies in a rage at peccadillos.

I glanced to the left and saw Mabel Cain. She was the centre of the group of musicians who occupied a floral platform. Her heart was in her work. She could not see the crowd so it did not affect her. A curious smile quivered on her lips, she played with a verve which I found compelling, but she no longer attracted me. I had perhaps been weak where she was concerned. The weakness had passed. I should never again think of her without a shudder, for I had perceived those values which lurk behind the smiling face of things.

I glanced to the right and noticed Don Comez and his wife. They were in the midst of older people who did not dance. One end of the room, scattered with lounge chairs, had been reserved for these. I followed the wall till I reached them. Don Comez saw me suddenly and rose. He was a tall reserved man with sombre eyes. His black beard, long and narrow, was like a folded fan. He greeted me in slow, but correct English.

“Ah, Mr. Broom! On behalf of my country and the other countries here represented, I welcome you. I have welcomed guests tonight in Castilian, in English, in French, and in Italian. The occasion has made me think. May the future be a ball-room! May our prejudices, like our cloaks, be cast aside as we enter it—to dance!” He shook hands with me gravely.

I was somewhat overwhelmed by the speech. It reminded me of a testimonial. I felt that it should

be framed and hung, or that I should at least make an equally finished reply. Don Comez said something to his wife while I was still groping for phrases. She was a stout amiable woman with the most perfect self-confidence I have ever seen. She said in stumbling French:

“Very happy to see you. You must dance with your whole heart. I as a young girl, how I love to dance at that period!”

“My wife regrets that she is unable to talk English.” Don Comez reflectively stroked his beard. He then went on: “I admire your country for everything except her religion. You will forgive my honesty?”

“Oh, I quite agree with you!”

He nodded sympathetically and said after a pause:

“Canon de St. Lo is my confessor and a good friend. I should have liked you to have met him. His mother, it may interest you to learn, was Castilian like myself. I wished him to honour us, but he considers it better not to appear. No doubt he is right.” He waved his arm gracefully. “But I detain you from pleasure. Forgive me. I shall surely see you later.”

I was dismissed and turned away. He called me back.

“An instant! There is next a valse and next an interval. The musicians, I am informed, must rest. My son, in the course of the interval, will

play the Barcarolle of Offenbach. My son is not of course professional, but he is considered to have a certain merit."

"I have heard so."

"It may possibly entertain you to be present when he plays. Do not forget. He will play at the first interval. And now I wish you beautiful partners and a happy evening." He smiled for the first time.

His wife put in:

"How I love to dance! But after the marriage there are rules. Marriage where the girl is frisky, that's a tragedy for an honest man!" She was thinking of our previous conversation.

I mechanically smiled and bowed. The dance ended as I turned away. I slowly passed through the heated throng. Exhausted couples chattered and laughed at my side. Several acquaintances spoke to me, and I answered them somehow. I had a second glimpse of Mabel Cain. She was now standing on her platform and gesticulating with her bow as she instructed the other musicians. A mood of unreason overcame me. Her animation was unnatural. She was blind; she had therefore no business to behave as she did. She was as horrible as an old woman pretending to be young. I could not endure the sight of her. I could not endure the crowd. The room was over-heated. Naked shoulders glittered in every direction. Expensive perfumes failed to disguise the odour of perspiring flesh. . . .

A panic seized me. I swerved sharply and pushed my way to an open window, stepped out and stood panting on the terrace. It was at least quiet. The place was empty and black with shadows. I could see the water, broad, tranquil, darkly glistening beneath the stars and the crescent moon. A light flashed in the distance on a lip of the Ancien Port. A bull-frog dismally croaked in the garden below. Two couples passed me, crossed the terrace, descended the steps. Their voices grew faint as they wandered over the place. I began to perceive the outline of a spire. It belonged to the church of St. John the Baptist, a concrete prayer, I thought, for it leapt upwards. My eyes followed till it ended, then I looked away. God was out of reach. The highest aspiration fell so short that it was scarcely distinguishable from a blasphemy.

A ribbon of light escaped the window and lay at my feet like a runner of magic carpet. The music suddenly recommenced. I hesitated but felt I could not go in; so I passed to a little table, sat down and slowly bent forward till my head rested on my fist. I was shocked, impotent and wretched.

A sound startled me. I straightened my shoulders as though they had been struck, and turned. A woman had stolen upon me.

It was with impatience that I recognized Miss Gay. Why had she followed me?

She must have guessed my emotions for she diffidently said:

"I would like to see you just now."

An unpleasant thought struck me. Hugh must be ill! I stood up.

"Hugh?" I rapidly inquired.

She looked startled but said softly:

"What do you mean?"

"He's been taken ill, hasn't he?"

"No. He's all right. At least, I hadn't heard . . . Did some one tell you he'd been taken ill?"

I sighed with relief.

"No. But I thought that was what you wished to tell me." My pulse steadied. I began to feel she had tricked me!

I looked at her. She was dressed in a dark pink frock, long and high-waisted. It was scarcely a ball-dress, for her neck was covered except for a V-shaped opening at the chest. The sleeves ended below her elbows in a film of lace. Her arms hung as though she were dispirited. She wore no rings, and it struck me that her hands were rough.

"I won't keep you long," she said. "My business will be over in twenty minutes at the most. But tell me if you want to dance. I could wait here and see you afterwards, perhaps. Or—or some other time."

Her simplicity disarmed me. I said what I should have said sooner.

"May I have this dance with you?"

"If you like." She handed me her programme. I was able to see that it was pitifully bare of engagements.

"Please sit down." I gave her my chair and sought another.

I knew I had been brusque but I had grown suspicious of all women. Mabel Cain had tricked me, flattered me till her ends were gained and cast me aside. She was now tricking my friend. How could I be sure that Miss Gay was not tricking me too? I determined to be circumspect, so I placed my chair at a distance from Miss Gay's.

"Well, now?" I assumed an air of attention.

She lowered her eyes and fixed them on her lap. Her hands rested there. One of them soon began to finger a fold of her frock. She suddenly tightened her lips and looked at me.

"It's Mr. Cardinal I've come to speak about," she said.

"Hugh? What's he been doing?"

She answered steadily after a long pause:

"You know very well, I think."

Subterfuge would have been childish, so I sighed and said:

"I know there's a lot of scandal being talked about him at present."

Her lips eagerly parted and she bent forward.

"Oh, Mr. Broom, do stop him! Stop him before it becomes too late."

"What do you mean?"

Her eyes shone with vexation.

"That — that girl! Mabel — Mabel Cain! Surely you know —"

"I know very well." I spoke sharply, for it was

hard to be told to appeal to Hugh when I had already done so and failed.

"Mabel Cain," she repeated.

She suddenly produced a handkerchief and blew her nose. She was crying! I was horrified.

"Miss Gay! The waiters. . . . Some one will see you."

"I don't care." She spoke in a stifled voice and dabbed her eyes.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "I daresay you don't! But I do!" I made a final appeal. "Miss Gay! I beg!"

She miserably regarded me.

"What's the matter?" I went on.

She struggled and became mistress of her emotions. I determined to be patient so I found my cigarette-case and opened it leisurely.

"A cigarette?" I asked in a neutral voice.

She quickly shook her head.

"No, thank you. I don't smoke." She perhaps feared that I thought she disapproved; for she added: "I'd like to very much, but it makes me sick."

"You don't mind the smell?"

"Oh, no, no! Mr. Cardinal's always smoking. I love it."

I lit a cigarette.

"Well?"

She slowly raised her eyes.

"You . . ." She appeared to swallow. "Couldn't you speak to him? You don't need to

preach sermons. You could just tell him what you thought. I don't know very much about these things, but I think the most wonderful sermon of all is when a man just talks quietly of what he feels."

I replied:

"I have spoken to him. I went to him this morning and gave him a hint. It was no use." I was mortified yet exalted by the confession.

"That was kind of you," she murmured.

"Oh, nothing!" I felt it was time to be practical. "Come! Don't let's be victims of intuition. Perhaps we exaggerate the whole affair. Let us hope that he isn't — er — amusing himself with Miss Cain."

Her reply astounded me.

"Oh, I'm sure he isn't!"

"But the scandal. . . ."

"Scandal? That's nothing."

I felt aggrieved.

"Then, Miss Gay, if it's nothing why trouble yourself concerning it. I've no doubt Hugh would agree with you. I — I don't. I don't like them to talk scandal about Hugh."

"Oh, you don't understand!" She rose unsteadily. Tears were in her voice. "You're his friend, so I thought you'd understand him. But you don't, a bit."

I interrupted.

"Let us walk." I stood up.

She hesitated, then said in a peculiar tone:

"I'd like to walk along the quay. Do you mind?"

I led the way in silence. We descended the steps, crossed the strip of garden, emerged on the tranquil Place. The peaceful night was like a deep sleep after a bad dream. The music from the hotel was not loud enough to disturb.

She said dreamily:

"Love teaches men to forget their old loves. But women are different. At least, I think so. It's very unsettling what they're playing in there just now. But of course it's meant to be. She'd see to that!"

I was shocked.

"Miss Gay, you don't imagine she's designing the whole programme only for her own ends?"

"I do, I do!" Her fierceness passed. She bitterly concluded: "What else do you suppose she'd study?"

"Well, unprincipled though she is, I expect she has a certain genuine interest in her art."

"Not now. Why should she? She's getting what she wanted it to bring her."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Are all women materialists?"

The music ended. A rattle of distant hand-claps called for an encore, but it was not granted.

"Oh, I don't imagine anything!" said Miss Gay. "I'm past that. I wish I could sleep for a hundred years. Mr. Broom! When you've imagined everything — everything again and again — you

feel like me. You just wish you could sleep for a hundred years." Her voice sank to a whisper.

I did not know what to say. We had reached the sea-wall of the Place St. Nicolas. It joined a quay at right-angles, and a rough causeway sloped to the water's edge. My companion began:

"If Mr. Cardinal . . ."

I started.

"Well?"

"Oh, I don't know! I've forgotten. I think you will be finding me very dull. I don't usually forget things."

"I thought you were absent-minded." The subject did not interest me. I pursued it merely because I was afraid of silence. We all have these moments of panic.

"Did you?" she replied idly.

"Yes. I thought so."

"Well. I'm not usually."

"You told me you were absent-minded."

"I don't remember."

"You put on Hugh's hat in mistake for your own. I was in the room at the time. I drew your attention to the mistake."

"Here is the quay."

I raised my shoulders and followed her. She had progressed but a few steps when she halted. We stood on the edge and looked over the angle of water. The town was a mass of shadows. A few lamps glimmered on the heights. There was a patch of rocks below us; this was faintly lit by the

stars and the young moon. A great cask was beside us, and on this we rested our arms. I drummed on the lid with my fingers.

"He's meeting her tonight," said Miss Gay, sadly.

"How do you know?"

"I looked over his shoulder and read his programme."

I was again shocked, but she seemed so unconscious that I grew perplexed. Miss Gay and Mabel Cain might be opposites. They had yet something in common. I suppose good and bad women differ really in their ends; their means are much the same.

"He'll bring her to the sea," I said.

"I think so."

"When do they meet?"

"At the interval."

I grew alarmed.

"But this is the interval now! I don't want to see them. Perhaps they are here already. Let us go."

"Mr. Broom!" Her voice shook.

"Well?"

"I've brought you here that you may see them."

"What? Oh, that's abominable!"

"Mr. Broom!" Her voice again checked me. "You've suspected too much and realized too little. You don't know your own friend. You'll know in a minute what . . . what I fear." There was a great sob. "Who cares about meanness at a time like

this?" She drew in her breath. "Oh, there he is!" she whispered, catching my wrist.

"Where?"

I followed her glance. Two dark shadows were approaching. One was Hugh, the other Mabel Cain.

"We can't," I began. I stopped. The situation had suddenly gripped me.

They were coming from the hotel and I thought for an instant they had seen us. They paused, however, at the top of the causeway and presently descended to the patch of rocks which was beneath.

4

I shall make no apology for the fact that I became an eavesdropper. It is astonishing how the estimate we form of our characters is contradicted by the knowledge of our actions. Are we products of our pet beliefs? We think so, but let us look for a moment at our lives. We find that their actions belie our beliefs. Dare we blame a biographer for misinterpreting us? He has only our actions to guide him. . . .

I shall instead re-exhibit the setting of the scene which was now enacted before me.

Hugh Cardinal, as he descended the causeway to the edge of the indigo sea, might have felt he was leaving the world. The smooth stone of the quay and the sea-wall rose to left and right of him respectively. There was nothing in front but the broad surface of the water merging into blackness.

He could not notice Miss Gay and myself; the great cask behind which we were standing, concealed us. We were yet but a few feet from him. I could hear everything he said, could have touched him with a long pole.

His first words were peculiar.

"I've brought you here for the happiness of guiding your steps." His voice, graver than usual, was reflective. His eyes were bright, but his face was composed.

Mabel Cain murmured:

"I'm so frightened I'll fall in."

He took her hand with a gesture and led her a few steps.

"Where are we now?" she asked.

"Where it's rougher still. You're absolutely dependent on me." He did not release her hand.

They were on the crest of a rock. He was standing a little above her. Their figures were silhouetted against the water.

"You've got an interval, haven't you?" he presently asked. "Is it a long one?"

"It's half-an-hour. Quite good."

"Quite good." He seemed to echo her.

She said after a pause:

"Don't you think we should go back?"

"No." He spoke positively with an air of faint disgust.

"People may talk."

"What people?"

"Mr. Broom might talk."

His expression grew cruel. He began:

"Has Aubrey been —"

"No, no!"

"For if he has, I'll break his neck."

"Silly! I tell you he hasn't. But he might talk."

"What makes you think so?"

"I'm afraid he doesn't like me."

"Then forget such a person exists."

"Hasn't he said horrid things to you ever? I mean, about me."

"Perhaps. But it's his business to tell lies. He's an author."

So much for the profession of letters! I knew Hugh in his present mood, cool, contemptuous, aggravating. It changed, however, even as I recognized it.

"I've had a rotten life," he said gloomily.

Mabel Cain did not reply but I was certain she pressed his hand; I had experienced her methods.

He abruptly released her, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, turned. He now faced me directly. His mouth was set, and his eyes glowed as he sombrely regarded his companion.

"I was educated in England," he went on. "One of these fancy schools where they have a staff of double first-class honours high-brows — to teach football. I couldn't play because of my weak heart and my unmentionable hand. So I became what the good books call 'precocious,' I suppose. Anyway, I struck up an acquaintance with a boy named

Laurence Bates. He lived with his widowed mother and his sister Rosa, in a rambling house in the heart of the old town. Rosa didn't go to school; she went to a 'seminary.' And Laurence didn't play games; he was too intellectual.

"Well. One day Laurence came up to me as we left the Greek class-room. 'By the way, Cardinal,' he drawled, 'my mother will be very pleased if you come to tea with us on Saturday.' I said I would be pleased too. Four o'clock on the following Saturday found me at the Bates's door-step, with a nice shining face that admirably reflected my state of mind. The house was in appearance a small mansion but it was really tumbling to pieces. Its rent couldn't have been more than twenty-five pounds a year. The owner counted for his tenants upon men with small incomes and large families, or pushing ambitious people anxious to impress their neighbours. I don't think I'm uncharitable when I put the Bateses in the latter class.

"I was ushered by a capped and aproned servant into a long dark dining-room panelled with cedar-wood. Mrs. Bates was there to receive me — a small, white-haired, sanctimonious woman, elaborately dressed as a widow. Laurence was there too, as supercilious as ever. But I had eyes for neither and only the merest commonplaces, for behind them was Rosa; I realized her for the first time. Realize! That pretty well expresses it. I had perhaps seen her before but I had certainly never looked at her. She would then have been but

a hurrying school-girl in navy serge, one of many; I loathed those school-girls. But now I became amazingly conscious of her hair, the colour of honey, of her eyes, blue as cornflowers, of her complexion, I can't describe her complexion. Her figure was the most graceful thing I had ever seen. They talk about 'senses being ravished'; mine were. The phrase is generally a beastly extravagance, but in this case it fails to express what I felt. I was enchanted. I could not take my eyes from her and I don't know to this day how I managed to touch her hand. I know that at the time the act seemed like sacrilege."

"You were in love with her," said Mabel Cain brightly.

The remark struck me as inept. I am sure Hugh would normally have found it so, would have shown irritation. He only said gravely:

"Yes. I was in love with her."

I think his companion dimly perceived that she had not risen to the occasion. Her next remark, at all events, betokened a real wish to understand; it was to her interest to understand.

"I'm not clever like Mr. Broom. I can't say things. I'm just a girl. But please go on, Mr. Cardinal."

His gravity melted. His slow, deep smile changed his expression for an instant and he became more reminiscent.

"Aubrey would smell an allegory in what I say. He would find something elusive, something sym-

bolic, in that moment. I don't know. Perhaps he would be right. Young love had conceived an ideal, had scarcely been aware of it, had met suddenly with its incarnation. Something of the sort. What a picture the scene would have made! In the foreground, clasping hands, stood the lovers — a wide-eyed girl, apparently sweet, and myself; I knew nothing by experience, yet everything by instinct. For a background, there was the loaded table with its shining cloth and faintly sparkling silver. And for a setting, there was the ancient room, full of shadows and the sad memories of by-gone loves.

“Well. I don't know what I ate that night. I've always detested milk but I drank it then because Rosa offered it; I had no words to refuse. After tea we went to a large, shabby parlour overcrowded with furniture. But by now my infatuation was chained. I can think of nothing more horrible than a dentist's waiting-room. I am quite sure it would have seemed holy if Rosa had been there to sanctify it. But about this parlour. There was a neglected piano in a corner. I remember that Laurence sang in a stifled artificial tenor of which he was disgustingly vain. The impression he made is almost blotted out by another impression, a grand one; Rosa played. School-girl tinkling? No doubt. But at the time I attended with the devotion of a rapt Paderewski audience. It wasn't the music which attracted me, but the quick business-like way in which she manipulated

the keys. After this, as though at the end of a benediction, I managed to tear myself away. I went back to the school with her fresh face floating in the darkness ahead of me. Elizabethan, wasn't it?

"It becomes mediaeval now. I shadowed her whenever I'd the chance. I was thrashed for breaking bounds, for not being present at matches, for slacking. I wrote her a silly poem. I became her brother's admirer, encouraged him, waited on him, gave him chocolates. She enjoyed my adoration; I'm convinced of it. It was rewarded at last. There was a dance, a rare event, given by some local magnate whose daughter was coming of age. We had special permission — the seniors, I mean — to go, and remain till eleven o'clock. Dissipation! I was thrilled to the tips of my misshapen fingers. Rosa was there. Enjoyment? Wait till you hear. She could spare me but one dance, for our hostess was too skilful to overstock her party with girls. So as supper approached I was tempted to bolt from the house. I think I would have gone but for my hostess; she gave me some fat nonentity to take in. I was docile enough to obey. Speaking not a word I marched her to the supper-room, deposited her on a seat, and without consulting her brought her a strawberry ice. That was all! My docility had reached its limits, you see. With never an apology I bolted from her presence, jostled my way to Rosa. She was sipping lemonade with her partner, a freckled young idiot named

Dawson. At Rosa's side I remained, heedless of by no means delicate hints which Dawson threw out at intervals. He left at the last in disgust. This was my chance and I took it. I begged an assignation for the following Wednesday. She was shy, at first, but in the end she told me I might come — over the garden wall."

He paused. The silence after his earnest voice was trying. I suspected him of more emotion than he showed. He moved his head for a moment as though he were swallowing. Mabel Cain said:

"Well, I think that the girl was awful! I don't in the least blame you. Men are different; I know that. But a nice girl wouldn't invite a boy over her garden wall."

I thought that Hugh was faintly amused. I welcomed the expression but it changed in a second; his face grew haggard, his eyes acquisitive.

"Child, have you no heart?" he murmured. He checked himself. "I want you to listen to the rest, though."

She nodded. He went on:

"Over the garden wall! Every one's anxious to get there, I fancy. They've had enough of their own world, and they think they will reach another by climbing up — to come down again on the other side! That's where Fate cheats them. The garden wall! Mark the significance of small events; I want you to mark that. The man who built that wall hadn't a notion of what he was doing. He was too good a builder. Builders are not famed

for imagination. He didn't know it was in his power to destroy or preserve an illusion. Let me explain exactly what I mean. The wall, I should say, was eight feet high. If it had been two feet lower my dreams wouldn't have been scattered. I'm quite able to remember the wall's formation. About six feet from the ground, there was a regular line of openings like loop-holes. I could touch them. That wasn't much good. But a tree had grown from the foundations, and been chopped down. Its stump rose a foot and a half. And a flagstaff in the garden at the other side was close to the wall and projected above it. It was probably for this reason that the tree had been cut down.

"I knew of this spot; Rosa had told me. I was to use the stump, a loop-hole and the flagstaff as a ladder. That was the plan. I don't know what I intended when I reached her. Nothing wrong, you may be sure. My admiration was as spiritual as human admiration can be. I just felt that my destiny was fulfilled when I found her. Her intentions were another matter. You shall hear them. There may have been an easier point at which I could have scaled the wall. It never occurred to me to seek it. Rosa had told me to do what I was doing. I obeyed like the hero of moral stories for good young boys. First I stood on the stump. Next I secured a grip in a loop-hole with my right hand. My head was now but a couple of feet below the top of the wall. What I should have

done was very clear. I should have tightened my grip, sprung and caught the flagstaff with my left hand. Ordinary muscle and a moment's scramble would have brought me to the top on my chest. What I did was to curse God for deforming my left hand. I might spring like a flea. It was useless. It would be impossible to grasp the flagstaff. I might certainly try with my right hand and I did so. Useless too. Its grip on the loop-hole was required to preserve my balance. The minute I let go and jumped, I tumbled. The more often I failed the more desperate I became. I gave up at last and tried to raise myself by my right hand. The thing was madness. An athlete would have done it only with much practice. My clothes were torn, my knees were scraped, my fingers bled and my heart was broken. I sat upon the stump, too wretched to think.

"In stories something happens; something always happens when the hero can do no more. Something happened now. I heard a trill of silly school-girl giggling. It was probably the one thing that could have roused me. I jumped up, then hesitated. The giggling recommenced, but now it seemed on every side. I lost my head and charged the night. There was a scurry of feet. I stretched out my hand and by pure luck caught something. What a ghastly smash for my ideals! The thing I grasped was my charmer's hair; she was at the pig-tail age. I forgot my admiration and became a furious school-boy. I tugged with intent to re-

venge. Rosa stifled a scream for she was practical even in distress. Three stupid little girls appeared. They thumped me and I let go — but not because of their thumping. No! I had remembered my admiration again, and now it stung me like the realization of a past sin. You know, I think hell is a place of memories. I thought so then; it was a funny thought for a school-boy. I saw the whole situation. Diabolical? Well. I can't say anything stronger. Just diabolical. Rosa had invited me for a joke. Those three girls were there to be entertained by me. The spectacle of a one-handed boy falling, how 'too killing' it must have been! I had been set a task which was impossible unless I had both hands. Amusing, wasn't it? My antics! Well. My sense of humour was deficient. I didn't see the joke — not till afterwards, that is. I stared at them for a long time, and then I began to cry. At first they were derisive, but at last they grew frightened. They clumsily wanted to comfort me. I stopped crying. 'I don't mind amusing you,' I said. 'You won't often be amused. Your future profession is clearly to amuse men.' I don't think they understood the innuendo, but it salved my pride at the time."

There was a long pause.

"The story's finished," Hugh abruptly declared.

These words snapped the thread of my attention. I realized the shame of my position, and my cheeks grew hot. Instinct prompted me to leave at once, and it was not curiosity which kept me. I knew,

however, that I could not go without being seen by Hugh. How could I explain my presence behind that cask?

Man is incapable of sustaining a single interest. His mind will soon wander even from the gravest problem. I unconsciously began to observe Hugh's companion. Her face was puzzled. I became sure that she found Hugh incomprehensible. She was trying hard to appear intelligent. Would he notice the effort, I wondered?

I think he noticed.

"I know you understand, you see." There was a hint of defiance in his voice, as though he challenged the silent night to deny that she understood.

"Yes, of course I understand!" She stopped. I suspected that she did not know how to go on.

"Every one wouldn't understand," he said.

"Every one's silly. You once told me so."

"The incident, that potty incident embittered my whole life. It came at a bad time, a dangerous age. It made me suspicious of everything that seemed on the surface decent. I was specially suspicious of women. I felt I disgusted them all. If they seemed to smile, it was only for what they could get."

"I wish you had told on that girl."

"I did better than that." His lips quivered, then tightened as he smiled slowly. "The following year I paid back her whole school. You see, I had visited France and got an idea. I fixed up a

board which implied that the school . . .” The twitching of his lips grew more pronounced. “Well. I think what I did was subtle. And the school was a bad one. Mistress and pupils, they were rotten.”

I nearly whistled, for I remembered the incident and knew what was written on the board; my eyes had been the first to read it. I had yet never suspected the motive of the jest. How little we understand the motives of even the most obvious actions!

“Mabel,” Hugh began. “You don’t mind if I call you Mabel?”

“I like it. I like my friends to be friendly.” She spoke frankly, but there was a hint of excitement in her voice.

The weird call of a violin broke the stillness. Louder and louder it rose. It came from the hotel but was so clear that it seemed at my elbow. The wind must have changed.

A sense of desolation and a great unrest overwhelmed me. Hugh, I could see, was likewise affected. The pleading music grew triumphant. It was Offenbach’s *Barcarolle* rendered superbly.

“The Comez boy,” said Mabel Cain pleasantly. “He’s just perfect. I wish I could play like that!”

“Night of love!” said Hugh in his deep voice. “God is speaking to us. Nothing matters but the stars.”

“It’s nice, isn’t it?”

He turned on her.

“Can’t you feel?” he cried. “You’ll break my

heart. And you so beautiful! My God! I can feel. Beautiful music is like a great golden hammer falling on a block of ice. It smashes my soul." He seized her arm.

"You're hurting me," she cried.

"You can feel, then."

"Oh, you're hurting me! You're cruel." She began to cry. "It isn't fair. You think I'm stupid because I'm different to you. But you have every sense. You can see. I could feel if I could see. I could feel more than you."

He released her.

"What have I done?" he said in a hunted voice. She pettishly turned and covered her face.

"What have I done?" he repeated. He dropped his hands on her shoulders. "Mabel! Forgive me! I'm distracted. What is my life? Nothing but regrets. What is my reward? What is there fine in my life? Aubrey? He has his work and a place in England. Miss Gay? An old maid who doesn't count. My job? A sinecure in hell! Mabel! Forgive me! Look at me! You're beautiful. I'm dying because of your beauty. For pity's sake, bring me peace. You've got to. It's fated. Don't you hear that music saying so? When I think of waking up . . . and you beside me. What am I saying? Marry me. Marry me, quickly. I love you, I love you, I love you! My girl. Darling girl . . ."

He took her in his arms. She was still crying as he kissed her. The violin music grew softer,

died. He lost his head and covered her hair with kisses. The moment ended and they separated. She was entranced; her eyes sparkled. He was triumphant; a gay smile was on his lips, but his eyes were deeply overshadowed.

I then became the subject of an odd fancy. They appeared to have changed places. I could believe that she saw, while Hugh was a blind man. Fear overcame me. I started back and I think I must have made a sound.

They had gone.

I stood for a long time staring at the rocks below. Marriage! Yes. Hugh must have always have intended it. It was typical of the folly in which he indulged and gloried. An intrigue? I remembered my fears with pity. Why had I not known? Miss Gay must have known.

I was reminded of her presence, so I looked for her. She lay at my feet in a state of collapse, but some seconds passed before I realized her condition.

I then cried in alarm:

"Miss Gay!"

"An old maid who doesn't count . . ."

"What?"

A sob answered me. She suddenly scrambled to her knees, swayed, then pressed her forehead against the rough cask.

"I put on his hat because it was his."

"What?" I repeated.

"Anything of his touching me . . . just heaven . . ."

A great light broke on me.

"You love him!" I blurted.

"I don't, I don't love him. . . . Yes, I do! How can any one help loving him? Oh, I'm a wicked girl! I'm ashamed, ashamed. A horrid old wretch like me . . . why should he mind? But it's sore . . . sore." Her voice rose. "Oh, go away, go away! Mr. Broom! If you don't go away I'll fling myself into the sea." Her voice quavered.

I began:

"But this is . . ."

She jumped to her feet. Her hands were clenched.

"Go away!"

I obeyed in silence. There are times when solitude is the best physician.

I plodded to the hotel with never a backward glance, paused at the door. My hostess's words recurred to me:

"Marriage where the girl is frisky, that's a tragedy for an honest man."

"Damn Hugh! Damn music!" I exclaimed.

I turned slowly to discover the hotel porter.

"Oh, you be damned also!" I muttered.

I brushed him aside and stamped past to my room.

PART II

PROFIT

CHAPTER I

FIRST FRUITS

1

SHOULD I tell Hugh of the scandal I had heard? I had first to be sure of my motive.

Mabel Cain had interrupted my friendship with Hugh. I had then wanted to destroy the attachment. Was my wish wholly unselfish? Hugh's happiness was in danger. Had I really cared as much for his as for my own? We are more primitive than we suspect. Our thoughts are usually subtle, but our actions simple. I had perhaps been jealous because Mabel Cain had supplanted me.

Hugh had interrupted my visits to the Café Vivaldi. I had always believed that my interest there was an honest one. How could I be certain? I saw I must face the truth. The Café Vivaldi had attracted me because of Mabel Cain. It was very easy to say that I was studying her. Every man studies the woman he loves, and most affections are unpremeditated. Had mine been unconsciously stirred? I found myself sure of nothing. Was I jealous of my friend, jealous of Hugh? Sex-rivalry is obscure. I was greatly disturbed by this reflec-

tion. It endowed with a sinister meaning my apparently most unselfish actions. . . .

I abandoned ethics and considered the results a warning to Hugh might produce. He would be angry, contemptuous and incredulous. There was something eastern about him. He was curiously distant even with his friends. It would be difficult to persuade him to hear me with an open mind. He would certainly confront me with Mabel Cain and I feared her weakness. She would weep and deny anything. You might send her to hell, I reflected. She would still assert that she was unfairly robbed of heaven. Her self-deceit was colossal. She would soon pretend that hell was heaven, and convince herself! How would Hugh be impressed? I was sure he would believe her for I could not prove my charges. Every one, I realized, is at his neighbour's mercy. The most wicked libel is certain to persuade some one.

2

I saw still less of Hugh in the weeks that followed his engagement. He was very busy. Miss Gay, pleading that her mother required her, had left for Vivario within three days of the Ball. Hugh was thus forced to perform his duties unaided. They required his attention for he was unused to them. His spare time he devoted to Mabel Cain, whom he had established in good rooms near the Palais de Justice. Let there be no mistake. The situation was decorous. A companion had

been engaged, a veritable dragon when a question of propriety arose. She was a small, quiet, punctilious woman, widow of a Corsican landowner. Madame Abbaticci! Every one knew and respected her, every one was known to her. She dressed in faded black, heard daily Mass, lived mostly on chestnuts, was always dignified.

The engagement created a stir. Criticism was frank.

Madame Abbaticci, whom I met by chance in the market, was not to be drawn. She bowed like a princess.

"Good-day, madame," I said.

She formally replied:

"Good-day, m'sieur."

I stopped.

"And the nuptials, they will be soon?"

"Perhaps yes, m'sieur. But m'sieur knows better than I. He is the friend of M'sieur Cardinal."

"Ma'm'selle, how is she?"

"Very well, thanks."

I ventured familiarity:

"The foreigners are always difficult?"

Her smile, sad and rare, was beautiful. She replied:

"Ah, m'sieur! You are indeed right. It is because of that I sympathize with ma'm'selle. To her I am a foreigner."

Hugh's servant was more explicit. He called on me to seek employment. This I could not offer, but I said:

"You surely will not leave M'sieur the Consul?"

"But yes, m'sieur."

"Why?"

He seemed embarrassed. I repeated my question and he became voluble:

"Stay with M'sieur the Consul? Yes, always. Stay with Madame his wife? Stay with a witch? Oh, she is hot-stuff! (*Toulours elle sent de la chaleur.*) M'sieur!" He crossed his lips with his thumb. The gesture was typically Corsican. "I know."

Hugh's criticism interested me most. We met by chance on an August morning. I was hastily leaving my tobacconist. Hugh was strolling without and we nearly collided.

"Hello!" he said coldly.

"Hello."

"You seem in a hurry."

"Well. I am."

"You'll get sunstroke. Death of a promising author. How is your book?"

"Fairly healthy."

"Then it's not like your last. I read it." He considered me. "When do you go home?"

"To England?"

"That's home, isn't it?"

"I don't know. At the end of the month, I think."

"Well, don't get sunstroke."

He would have passed on but I stopped him.

"How are you, Hugh?" I spoke on an impulse.

My grievances had suddenly dwindled. Hugh might be foolish; he was still Hugh.

He seemed inwardly to debate. His lips twitched and he smiled slowly.

"I've had a letter from my uncle."

His voice told me nothing but I guessed he was answering my question. He leisurely searched his pockets.

"I want you to read it," he said.

He handed me a crisp quarto sheet, probably made for the typewriter. I unfolded it; the hand, I thought, was effeminate. "The Grotto Princess, No. 1 Company" was stamped at the top with a black dye. A list of provincial theatres, headed: "Autumn Tour, 1919," was printed at the left-hand corner. The right bore a written address: "Theatre Royal, Brighton."

I read:

"My dear nephew — The announcement of your engagement I have received with mixed feelings of doubt, apprehension and surprise. The information you afford me concerning the girl who will bear your name and share your future — that future of which a poet has said not inappropriately: 'For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred. Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.' But I must not digress, for my life is so full that I have little time for leisure. The information you afford me is slight. You tell me that her parents are both dead, that she is blind, that she is not

wealthy, that she is professional like myself. This last can hardly be strictly the case. Providence has so gifted me that I occupy a position which few may hope to aspire to. Surely there is not a good theatre in Corsica, where first-class companies with only the best players may come?

“Let me write as one man of the world to another. I have always hoped that when you married I should have good reason to be proud. You know and I know the value of my position. It is something to be my nephew. You might have married a woman of means. You might even have married into the peerage for I know a few lords intimately. But I will say no more. You are captain of your own destiny. Only remember this: I am unable and shall always be unable to help you financially, for the responsibilities of my position are many.

“I am touring as you see in *The Grotto Princess*. My fellow-players hamper me and the play does not deserve such good production, but my voice does what it can.

“And now I bid you good-bye as the sun sets and the shadows steal down from the mountains.

“The best of good wishes from your uncle —

“LIONEL MCBAIN.”

I returned the letter without comment.

“His real name is Lionel Figgins,” said Hugh. I nodded. He went on savagely:

“I might have married some hag of a peeress for

he knows lords intimately! Did you read that?"

"Yes."

"You didn't miss his farewell, I hope? I know it by heart. 'And now I bid you good-bye as the sun sets and the shadows steal down from the mountains.' Did you read that too?"

"I read it."

"Well. Why don't you say something sensible?" He coughed twice. "Shadows from the mountains! It's the cue before the waltz-song in the second act, I expect. There are no mountains in Brighton — only hotels . . . God! I wish I could see a Brighton hotel!"

"Come home with me."

He shook his head.

"I can't do that."

I was swayed by a second impulse, had yielded before I realized.

"About your engagement," I began.

He became attentive.

"Yes?"

"I was present when you asked her to marry you."

He studied me gravely for a long time. I confess that I was frightened, for his anger was violent. He was capable of striking me; I felt I deserved a blow.

"I thought you were," he said at last.

"You knew?"

"I guessed. Just at the end, of course. You made a sound. I was coming to inspect when I

thought of you. I began to believe it was you who were watching." He grew reflective. "That's curious! I wonder why I thought of you!"

"Why didn't you come?"

"Better not."

My face burnt.

"Hugh," I exclaimed. "I beg your pardon most sincerely. I wasn't spying. I was there. And you came. And — and I watched."

"But you didn't mean any harm?" His eyes searched me.

"I didn't, Hugh. It was just . . . I can't believe even now. . . . Well. I'm not able to explain."

"Don't try. Things happen very easily. God knows, I've found that true!"

"Hugh!"

"Yes."

"Oh, well! Damn it!"

His expression became amused.

"You see, I'm still reasonable," he said.

"Don't let's speak of it."

"Why not? Silence keeps you from forgetting. And anyway, you got some copy."

"Never!"

His eyes darkened, his face grew cruel.

"I'm not ashamed," he declared.

"No."

"But you want me to be ashamed. You'd think me better if I seduced her."

"Not better. But . . ."

"Wiser." He laughed bitterly. "Wisdom! The consolation of those whom folly rejects. I thought it had rejected me. I believed that no one would look at me. Man, it's folly that makes life worth! I'm happy, I'm gorgeously happy."

"Long may it last!"

"It will." He paused. "The fact is," he doggedly went on, "you're all against me because I am marrying Mabel. You say this, somebody else says that. Why the hell do you speak at all? We don't want to know what you think. I think that I'll marry Mabel. She thinks that she'll marry me. All right. The wedding's a good thing, or logicians are perjurers."

"We're not against you, Hugh."

"Then why do you desert me?"

"Desert you?"

"Yes." He spoke fretfully. "Miss Gay's gone, Costa is going, you've gone."

"I haven't."

"Haven't you?" His manner changed. He studied me. "You think, perhaps, I'm past caring for friendship. I am not. I shall marry Mabel. Every one can cut me but I shall marry Mabel; make no mistake. But of course I'd rather they didn't cut me. I'm human, man! I need friends more than ever, now—for my wife's sake. My wife is going to be happy. And friends will help me to make her so."

"What can I do?"

"Come round to see me sometimes."

"I will, Hugh."

"Mabel may perhaps be there."

"Of course."

What could I say? He had dropped his defences, bluntly appealed for friends. I was soon leaving for England and might never see him again.

Opposition would increase his obstinacy; I knew him. He was possibly susceptible to influence. I went to see him the same evening. It was the first of many visits.

CHAPTER II

A GLIMPSE

1

HUGH sent for me a few days later. It was, I remember, the eve of the Assumption, and the streets were lively with country-people come to town for the Feast.

I found him on his verandah. He was being ostentatiously calm in a deck-chair, but the little smile which troubled his lips told of excitement. A cigarette, which he fitfully inhaled, burnt in his right hand. His left he had partially concealed. This fact showed he was in a good temper.

I was greeted impatiently.

"Sit down, sit down."

I drew up a chair.

"Have a drink?" he suggested.

"No, thanks."

He immediately went on:

"What utter idiots are half man-kind!"

"Pretty sweeping, that!"

"Mm? Rot! It's absolute truth. They spend their lives wanting something. And all the time it's lying at their side. They've got it, if they only knew."

"Have they?"

"Yes. I just said so, didn't I? Don't look so cautious. Man, you're too respectable! You should get drunk sometimes." His cigarette caught his eye. He studied it for a moment, then pitched it into the garden. "Well. I've got money," he said, leaning back.

I waited particulars.

"Yes," he went on. "I've got money. Or at least I'm to get it, which is the same thing. You needn't be afraid. I haven't stolen it. It's coming most legally. My bank's lending it. Damned foolish of them, but that's their affair."

I sat up.

"Really, Hugh?"

"Yes. I'm not joking." His tone was serious as though he appreciated the unreality of what had happened. "I wrote a week ago in a fit of the blues. They answered me today, and it's all arranged. They're charging me six per cent. and I've to insure my life for ten years. Well. Of course I can do that. You know what I've saved. Two hundred pounds."

"How much are they lending?"

"Forty thousand francs. That's about a thousand pounds."

"How will you repay?"

"Off my income. At the rate of a hundred a year. I'm insuring for two thousand."

I meditated.

"It's risky," I decided.

He sighed, then smiled tolerantly.

"Sometimes, Aubrey, you make me tired. Life is always risky. We are born — at a risk. We live —"

"That's all right, Hugh. Never mind the philosophy." He had made me impatient. I felt I was listening to one of my own books! I went on:

"You'll spend the thousand you get in three years. The fourth year —"

"Be hanged!"

"What will you do?"

"Damn it, man. Do you think I'm going to stick here for ever? I'll get promotion. I'll get a job with a better screw."

There was something in what he said. I sighed.

"Well. I suppose I congratulate, then. All the same . . ." I stopped. "At any rate, you'll be able to buy some of the peace you are wanting."

"I'll be able to get married — decently married at once."

"Yes. That's true."

I was leaning back when he stopped me:

"Don't do that! I want you to do me a favour. Comez is coming on business, and he's always late, confound him! I've got to be around. I wish Miss Gay hadn't left. She was useful."

"What's the favour?"

"Go to Mabel. Explain what I've just told you. Ask her to come here tonight with the Abbattucci female, of course."

"Oh, very well!"

"Then go now."

I rose. It was better to humour him. His exalted mood would make him impossible for at least another half-hour.

2

I went indirectly for I wanted to think. The golden Place was partly overshadowed as I left it for the Rue Napoléon. Dusk was already falling.

I was delayed at the Church of St. Roch by the crowd coming out from confession. Those who jostled me at once apologized. Something touched my heel, and a woman's voice murmured:

"Oh!"

The accent was familiar. I started, turned and discovered Miss Gay. To find at our side a friend we believed at a distance! It is always strange. We are still barbarians at heart, we can never conceive identities other than our own. People, we imagine, must be where we put them, do as we will them, go out like candles when they leave us. That they act of themselves is a truth which is always amazing.

"Miss Gay! But you went to the hills!" I exclaimed as I lifted my hat.

She murmured that "she hadn't expected to meet me."

"Of course you must be staying the night?"

"In my old rooms . . . I don't know."

"I see. Well. Good-bye."

I had raised my hat and gone a few steps when she called:

"Oh, please! I should like to speak to you, if you don't mind."

I came back.

"But where can we go?" She seemed worried.

"There's a café in the Cours Sebastiani. It's quite all right. Crowded today; that's certain. But we may find a seat."

She accompanied me in silence. I had by now recovered from my surprise. She was ill at ease but I could understand the cause. I had last seen her under very trying circumstances. I said without thinking:

"I didn't know you were a Catholic."

"I've just become one." Her voice was low.

"What!" I realized how crude I must appear. "I congratulate you," I went on, striving to seem unconcerned.

"Thank you very much." Her voice was lower still.

She had again surprised me for I had opened the subject, not to draw her opinions, but to put her at her ease. I might, in the same way, have said to a small boy inspecting aeroplanes: "I didn't know you flew." I should have been no more astounded had he shown me a pilot's certificate. I should have been at a loss what to say. I was at a loss now. We reached the café while I was still pondering. The little tables were crowded, but a party of three rose in a few seconds. Miss Gay

and I quickly took their place. A waiter appeared, gathered their glasses, perfunctorily mopped the table. He expected an order so I glanced at my companion. She shook her head.

"A citronnade," I decided.

He muttered "Understood," went off, reappeared in a minute with a tall glass, a lemon-squeezer, a lemon cut in half, four pieces of loaf-sugar and a carafe of sterilized water. The price was seventy-five centimes. I gave him eighty-five and he was grateful.

A deep shadow like a brown veil lay upon the Cours. The air was fresh, for a breeze was blowing from the sea. I could glimpse, between shuttered houses, the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville. It was gay with promenading couples.

"Do you think," my companion began.

I started, roused my attention.

"Do you think," she went on, "that it's weak to rely on another's decision?"

I reflected.

"It depends. Technical matters we can't decide for ourselves. For instance, it's not weak to call in a doctor to decide on the treatment of a wound. It's not weak for an amateur to consult a professional author."

She sighed.

"That's what I told mother." There was a long pause. "Oh," she broke out, "I've done an awful thing!" Her tone was dispirited. She spoke as though she were stating a simple truth.

I did not reply.

"Yes," she went on. "I see what I've done. I told you I'd become a Catholic. Well. I—I don't believe in it at all. I know that now." She spoke quietly but kept locking and unlocking her fingers. "I made up my mind to put myself under instruction. I said I believed. But I was just cheating myself. It was confession tempted me; I wanted to go to confession. I felt there was something I ought to do. And at the same time I felt that it would break my heart—if I did it, I mean. Then the thought came to me: 'If I were a Catholic I could go to confession and get a priest to tell me not to do it.' Oh! That sounds weak, horrible, like an idiot. But I can't put it better." She paused.

Two boys hurried past singing in the *patois*, which is a dialect of Italy. I was all attention now.

"I thought that," she continued, "so I went to the priest. All the time he was instructing me I was miserable. I couldn't believe what he said. How could I? I wasn't even attending. I was just—just completing a formality, something that had to be done before I could go to confession. Well. I was received today. I went to confession. I told the priest about my trouble, I told him why I couldn't speak of what I knew. But somehow it didn't sound convincing. And instead of comforting me he says that I must speak! It was bad enough before when I felt that I ought to speak—

but couldn't. It's worse now, ever so much worse, for here's my suffering increased. And I've been mean and wicked to no purpose, for the priest at Vivario's a dear. He's ugly and old and like a saint." She stopped abruptly. A tear glittered on her cheek.

I had heard with interest this feminine, this very feminine, explanation. Criticism, I saw, was expected. I dropped the sugar into my glass, squeezed the lemon, poured in the juice. Conviction came as I did these trivial actions; I looked up.

"May I ask an impertinent question?"

She seemed apprehensive, but replied:

"Ask what you like. I'm sure you will ask only what you think is right."

"And you don't need to answer."

She nodded and lowered her eyes.

"Well. This is my question. Did you tell the priest in your confession what you have told me?"

Her eyes grew wide. There was a long silence.

"Oh, no, no!" she said at last. "I — I couldn't do that."

"Then your confession wasn't a confession at all."

There was another silence. She slowly bent her head till her sensitive face was hidden by her hat. I think she was crying.

"There's just one thing that you can do," I said. "Go to confession again. And in any case make up your mind to do what this priest advised you. The secret you mentioned, you say that your con-

science tells you to speak of it. The feeling that your heart will break, it's only a selfish feeling." I concluded: "But it's very easy to give advice. I know that. I know how you feel."

She looked up suddenly. Her eyes were dry and angry.

"You advise this too?"

"Yes. You've put yourself in a false situation so complicated that only one thing can save it: simplicity. Miss Gay, you're able, you're great enough to be simple. Follow your conscience and nothing else. And perhaps you will find that faith has come after all — when you've followed your conscience, I mean."

"I won't do it!"

Her vehemence surprised me. I at once abandoned the argument. She rapidly went on:

"You think that I've nothing to do but be good. It's a shame. All of you think that. *He* used me because I could do all his work. Now he makes fun of me with — with that cat who's put him in a trance. But I'm not to care. I'm to go on being a useful old maid, above the temptations of the world, outside its vanities — and outside it's pleasures. Oh, it's not fair!" she cried passionately; "I've never had a chance to be a girl. I've been shut up in this island all my life. First with father and mother who treated me as a child. Then with *him* who treated me as though I were his aunt. Oh, you're all cruel, everything's cruel."

I rose and said:

"Let's go."

She rose too.

"I wish she was dead!" she declared.

"Well . . . " I raised my shoulders.

"I hope her eyes will get worse."

I could understand the first but not the second wish. The marriage was a tragedy for Hugh but a triumph for Mabel Cain. His damnation, her salvation! I tried to consider the idea but was in no mood for philosophy. It is difficult to regard a personal disaster from a genial standpoint. Wars would cease if we could see with our enemies' eyes. . . .

Yes. I could understand that Miss Gay, a gentle creature, a good woman, might yet be carried so far as to wish for her rival's death. To wish that "her eyes might get worse" was another matter. Mabel Cain's misfortune was as bad as could be. It was not as if there were hope for her.

Well. Women would be women, I thought. . . .

We stopped by mutual consent at the Rue Neuve St. Roch. Miss Gay said:

"And I mean to go home tomorrow. I would go tonight if there was a train. I'm sorry I came, sorry I went to a priest, sorry I spoke to you. I'll stop being a Catholic. And I won't tell Hugh what I know!"

"Hugh!"

She almost ran from me before I could say more.

Marriages may be made in heaven. If that were so, I reflected, they arrived in pieces and were put

together by an amateur. Some seconds elapsed before I grew ashamed of the thought.

3

I passed the Hôtel de Ville, skirted the Church of St. John, entered the Rue des Terrasses. The street was but six feet wide and rose in a series of shallow steps. Occasional arches joined the high buildings. Venetian shutters, slate-coloured, jealously guarded the windows. A shrivelled branch advertised the door of a wine-shop. The light was low, the scene Moorish.

I climbed till the twisting street led me to the Boulevard du Palais. The latter was in contrast so modern that I could scarcely believe it a part of the same town. I approached the Palais de Justice. Mabel Cain was near, but I could not remember her address so I knocked at a wooden door.

Voices had been crying within but a distressing silence followed. There was a sharp command, a shuffle of feet, the smart *clack* of the latch. The door swung back, and the scent of garlic choked me. I perceived a stout woman with untidy hair and an open bodice. She stared for a few seconds, then addressed me in the *patois*. I shook my head and asked in French:

“The way to the apartment of Ma’m’selle Cain, if you please?”

“What?”

“You well know Ma’m’selle Cain. Kindly direct me to her apartment, madame.”

"Ma'm'selle Cain?" Recognition lit her eyes.
"Ma'm'selle Cain?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"Opposite."

I thanked her and turned away, crossed the road and glanced back. My informant had not withdrawn. She had been joined by a dirty child with large brown eyes. To him, however, she was not attending. She was watching me with an interest that I found disconcerting. She caught my eye, nodded encouragement, pointed to a low entry. This led to a wooden stair-case. The latter, frowsy and forbidding, was scattered with the peelings of onions. A wedge of rotting melon lurked on a dark step, and on this I nearly slipped. I persevered, however, and things grew better; for I reached a landing tolerably clean, from which led two doors.

I rapped at the nearer.

Mabel Cain answered me in French:

"Who is it?"

I murmured in English:

"Please open the door."

"Who is it?" she repeated. "I can't understand what you are saying."

I lost my head and cried too loudly:

"It's me. Mr.—oh—You know me, Miss Cain." I discovered that I could not pronounce my name!

"Oh!" There was a brief pause. She then said in English: "Is it Mr. Broom?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" There was another pause. "Madame Abbattucci's out. And so is the landlady. And I'm just changing. Wait a second."

There was a third pause. I could hear light quick steps.

"I'm coming," she went on.

The door opened with her remark. I plunged in and closed the door. I was in darkness, oppressive darkness. The air was perfumed with toilet soap.

A pale outline grew perceptible on my left. It presently stirred, and I knew that Mabel Cain was beside me.

"Madame Abbattucci will be back soon," she said. She added: "But not for half-an-hour."

I was hopelessly bewildered by the darkness.

"We don't often use this door," she went on. "It leads to my room. Did you knock at the other? Perhaps I didn't hear."

Her room! I cursed my stupidity. I should have remembered the planning of Corsican houses. The darkness still dismayed me. My hands instinctively groped till they happened to touch her breast. I withdrew them then as though they had touched a scorpion. She seemed to recoil. I fancied too that she giggled.

"The shutters," I said, moving to the window.

"What time is it?"

"I don't know. About six, I expect."

"Then the sun will have almost set."

"Of course," I stopped. "Is there a candle?"

"Somewhere."

"May I light it?"

"If you like." She presently added: "Let me find it."

We began our search. I could now see more plainly and was so busy trying to discern her face that I forgot to notice my hands. They presently encountered hers. I instantly let go but was shocked to see her quiver and slowly become apathetic. I thought that a sudden sickness had taken her. She would perhaps faint. My imagination sketched me a fainting girl and myself alone with her. An aghast whisper came from me:

"I say!"

I slipped my arm round her shoulders to keep her from stumbling. Another second found her against me. She averted her face, then turned it to mine and tilted her chin. She expected me to kiss her! The knowledge came like a blow.

Shall I analyse my sensations? The most poignant moments defy analysis. It is, moreover, difficult to write without complacency of personal adventures, but I want to be honest. Mingled emotions of amazement, recklessness, triumph and amusement possessed me. These were succeeded by anger. Anger made way for disgust. I escaped and started back so violently that my thigh was bruised on the edge of a table. Something in my pocket rattled. A voice in my heart said:

"Matches!"

I pressed my lips and fumbled in my pocket. My fingers closed on a little box. I pushed it open. Half the contents spilled but I secured a match. This I lit, and an unsteady glow diffused the darkness, but I could see no candle. My black shadow on the wall fled before me as I turned. A wax candle in a china sconce was on the mantel-piece. I had just time to light it ere my match went out.

The cone of flame expanded, shrank, again expanded and grew steady. I was now reassured but motionless, silent, watchful of Mabel Cain. She seemed puzzled but still confident. My movements she must have followed with sufficient care to understand.

I ceased with an effort to observe her and observed her environment instead. The room was curiously symbolic of its occupier. She had so placed the furniture that the centre of the floor was clear. The walls were naked. A bed with a soft quilt filled the stuffiest corner, and a silk night-dress lay crumpled on the square pillow. I could not believe that the thick carpet was provided by the landlady. Mabel Cain must have bought it.

I again looked at her. She was fresh, clean and tidy. Her brown hair was neatly coiled, her grey frock well made. She still seemed expectant. It was difficult to realize her infirmity. Her bright eyes were wide and full of expression. The pupils only were peculiar, grey instead of black. I began to pity her but she repelled me at the same time.

I quickly made up my mind, reached the door in five steps. She darted ahead and blocked my path. Her palms lightly pressed the door as she faced me. Her poise was tense, her eyes had grown deep and full of purpose. Her face was a boy's, studious, dark, classic. She was a little breathless and parted her lips.

Her rush disconcerted me.

"I want to go," I said in a low voice.

She maintained her position for fifteen seconds. Her muscles finally relaxed. She straightened herself and closed her lips, but did not offer to step aside.

"I want to go," I repeated.

"Why?"

"It is getting late. I have still to dine while you . . . must complete your toilet."

"But you came to see me." She appeared to challenge denial.

"Yes, but . . ."

"Then you wanted to — to say something."

"Possibly. But I've come to the conclusion that the moment is unfortunate. I've changed my mind. Please let me pass, Miss Cain."

"I — I can hardly believe that."

"Can't you? Then you force me to speak out. I'm leaving because of what happened just now." I spoke significantly.

"What's happened?"

I did not reply.

"I've done nothing, nothing!" she expostulated.

Her tone was suddenly hysterical. She spread her arms in the most innocent gesture.

The silliness of her pretence angered me.

"You behaved like a wanton," I said.

"I didn't! I swear I didn't!"

"You thought I had come to rival my friend. The mistake is for you natural."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Good heavens! You say that! And a moment ago you expected a kiss!"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I don't understand these things."

"No. I suppose you would tell me they're 'not nice.'"

She covered her face and sobbed. I struggled with an impulse to apologize. The impulse was ridiculous but not unnatural. Her apparent candour was compelling. I am sure I should have believed her then in defiance of my dearest friend. I had to tell myself:

"But you saw her! You saw her!"

"It's too — too bad!" she murmured. Her face was still covered. "I'm blind. I can't see what you're doing. I can only guess and you take advantage of me."

"You were quite ready to be kissed." I know how crude the remark must sound. I knew it then but was past caring. I was fighting for sanity.

She changed her tactics with a speed that left me incredulous.

"Well? What if I was? You came to my

room. I thought you wanted to be friends with me." She dropped her hands. "Any girl would have thought that."

"Kiss and be friends!" I had to thrust the children's phrase aside. Why do frivolous thoughts interrupt our most serious deductions? They are like drains emptying into a deep river.

"I can't argue with you," I said. "Please let me pass."

"What are you going to do?"

"Tell Hugh."

She caught my arm as I moved.

"Oh, how mean of you!"

"Mean?" I paused.

"Yes. Of course it's mean." She went on rapidly: "You think I don't know, but you're jealous because Hugh's your friend and he cares for me more than he does for you."

The charge astounded me. I had suffered torture lest it might be true. How had she divined my suffering? I had now no wish to go. She had grown a problem which called for a speedy solution. I began:

"But I thought —"

"You thought horrid things. I told you so." She went on quietly: "You can't tell him, of course."

"Why not?"

"I've told you why not. Because it would be mean. You're a gentleman. No gentleman would do that sort of thing."

“Loyalty to my friend —”

“Loyalty is no argument. Perhaps it would be different if you'd found out things honourably. Some one might have told you. Or you might have asked me questions and learnt that way. You didn't though. You learnt what you have by a mistake; you said so yourself. It's as if you'd been listening at the door or pretending to be some one else. If I hadn't been blind you couldn't have found out. I wouldn't have made the mistake. You can't take advantage of a girl's blindness. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be Christian. It wouldn't be —”

“Stop, stop!”

She obeyed. I presently said:

“Why do you want to marry my friend?”

She eagerly replied:

“It's the chance of my life.”

“Do you love him?”

“I don't know the meaning of love. I've never loved any one. All boys are the same to me. Hugh's nice, of course. Other girls don't seem to find him so. Perhaps he's right, perhaps it's his hand which frightens them. Well. I can't see it, so why should I care? And he's crazy about me. I'm not going to miss such a chance. Am I? I'd be a little ass if I did. Surely you know that.”

“You've suddenly become very reasonable.”

“Every girl can be reasonable when she's looking at her own case.”

She made the admission calmly. I stared in in-

dignation but saw she was not conscious of anything extraordinary. She appeared rather to be reminding me of a truth I was bound to recognize. Her assurance compelled admiration.

She changed even as I watched her. Her calmness forsook her and she drew herself up. Her lips were firm, her nostrils quivered. Her right arm was tense and the tips of her fingers pressed a table.

"If you don't apologize and leave me I'll call for help," she declared.

The injustice left me speechless. I thought for a moment she was mad.

"What — what do you mean?" I stammered.

"You've forced your way into my room and tried to do wicked things with me."

"I —"

"Yes, you have!"

"Why! I never so much —"

"Don't excuse yourself. You did. And if you won't leave I'll tell Madame Abbaticci. She's on the stairs now."

"But how do you make out —"

"Because I say so. And I'll tell Hugh. He'll believe me, see if he doesn't. Every one shall know the horrid thing you've done."

"Look here!"

"You thought I could be fond of you. Well. I couldn't. I couldn't be fond of a fellow like you, not if there was no one else alive! I hate you! I hate you awfully! You call yourself a man but I

don't believe it! Man! Why, if I had my sight I'd become blind again rather than see you. But you can't do it with a girl and then refuse to marry her. You've got more money than Hugh, I've found out. If I lose him through what you've done, then I'll marry you. Though you're mean, hateful, despicable! You're a . . . you're . . . ”

She became inarticulate, stopped. I heard a sound on the stairs. Madame Abbattucci was indeed returning. Had Mabel Cain deliberately planned this escape? Had she been acting a part, detaining me till the time for action should be ripe, or was her outburst spontaneous, a fresh example of a versatile character? I did not know.

Events, however, had been moving too quickly. My mind was confused.

“Miss Cain,” I said, “the game we've been playing is finished. You are too unscrupulous, or, shall we say, professional. The amateur withdraws.”

She answered steadily:

“I don't know what you're talking about. You came here and offered me money to make love to you. I'll swear that to any one.”

I studied her.

“I believe you would.”

“People will be convinced.”

I studied her again.

“Better still,” I went on, “I believe you would in the end convince yourself.”

There was a step without. I opened a door, crossed the hall, opened a second door. Madame Abbattucci confronted me.

“M’sieur Cardinal requests that you bring ma’m’selle,” I said. “This evening. To his villa. Me, I cannot bear ma’m’selle. I have waited only your return.”

She inclined her head. I slipped past her, descended the stairs two at a time. The southern night awaited me.

A peace had fallen on the island, a solemn peace as though it lay expectant of the morrow. The sky, like polished steel, was blazing with soft stars.

CHAPTER III

MABEL CAIN'S DECISION

1

BLINDNESS must always, I suppose, affect our sympathies deeply. Mabel Cain's misfortune had alone brought about her exposure. I could therefore profit only by her weakness; the fact was unchallengeable. She had compared me to an enemy who won by listening at the door. I could think of a better simile. We were competitors in a race and the prize was Hugh. She was outstripping me till chance intervened. My foot slipped, tripped her and lamed her. What was I to do? I might continue and gain the prize but my conscience would be left uneasy. What would the spectators say? All would agree that luck had treated her badly. The opinion of many has a certain value. It deserves at least consideration.

I was also afraid. Why play the hypocrite over a natural emotion? Men glory in their hates, are reminiscent of their loves, but will not admit their fears. Fear, however, is a faithful prophet. To disregard it is often foolish, never brave but when a noble cause is served. Reason counselled me not to disregard it. My case, though clear, could not

be proved. I might sacrifice myself in vain. Sacrifice? Yes. The word was apposite. Mabel Cain was not to be despised. She had said that "if she lost Hugh, she would marry me." The threat seemed extravagant but I was not sure. Ingenious perjury will accomplish much, for it is easy to convince an uncharitable world of guilt. She would hint at violence, even say I had seduced her, break her engagement with Hugh. He would then expect me to marry her. I need not, it is true, obey, but I should always be regarded as a scoundrel.

Mabel Cain as a wife! I pictured for the first time exactly what the phrase meant. A "good marriage" would be the making of her. She was too egotistical to care for social rebuffs. Vanity would preserve this confidence. She would never be disillusioned in self. About her husband she would have no illusions. Life would suffice her were she given a regular income and a status that was sound in the abstract. But the partner in the "good marriage"! The phrase would mock him. His life would be a long torment. I could see him exiled, impotent, snatched from the pursuit of his ambitions. He would suffer doubly, for his wife and for himself; he would hate his wife because she was unable to feel.

The logic of silence! How unanswerable it is, how wise are the monks who prescribe silence for thinkers! I saw our culture for the fallacy it is as I walked back to my hotel through the hushed town. Man and his works seemed puny. The

gaunt mountains, the great darkness, the sparkling sky cried the omnipotence of a Power above man. I saw things as they were. We are prone to a feeble optimism which is not fine. "Do this and see what will result," says conscience. "Do this but don't let us look," we reply. We try to escape the bill by pretending that we do not see it. Let us dare honesty at least. On every deed there is a tax and the tax must be paid somehow. . . .

I descended the Avenue Carnot and paused at the steps to the hotel. The spars and funnel of a ship rose on my left from the Nouveau Port. The sea, very quiet, reflected the stars, and the dark bulk of Elba was visible far away. I remembered the man who had made it famous. The logic of silence! He had known it. On every deed there is a tax and the tax must be paid somehow! I think he had learnt the lesson in the end.

I climbed the steps, entered the hotel. The proprietor instantly appeared as though he had waited to waylay me.

"Good-evening, m'sieur," he said with an air of excitement.

"Good-evening."

"M'sieur, the boat is arrived three days too soon!"

I did not laugh at his excitement. His living depended on the movements of that boat. I said:

"Perhaps because of the Feast."

"Perhaps."

"It has brought you visitors?"

"Three. Two travellers of commerce and an Englishman who has gone to visit M'sieur Cardinal."

"I shall dine and then visit M'sieur Cardinal too."

The resolution was formed suddenly. I would no longer thwart Hugh. He, like each one of us, was in the hands of Providence. I would merely be ready with my friendship.

"Good Feast!" I said.

"Thanks, m'sieur. Good Feast!"

I nodded and passed on.

A great trunk lay at the foot of the stairs. It was so clumsy that I felt it belonged to the "Englishman."

2

I dined leisurely on Corsican fare. There were fish soup, whitebait fried in oil, French beans, *sanguì* (little puddings made of aromatic herbs), goats' milk cheese and a riot of delicate fruits. The red wine of the country was so strong that I mixed it with mineral water. The meal was served on the terrace, which blazed with electric lights. I lingered afterwards with black coffee and a *cigarette Bastos*. A fishing-smack entered the bay, and the rowers sang in Italian as the phosphorence dripped from their oars. The boat glided from my sight into the shadow of the Ancien Port.

I rose, dusted the ash from my coat, re-entered the hotel and found my hat and stick. It was very lonely without, so I kept the centre of the road. I

reached the waste ground which surrounded Hugh's villa. The maddening *chir-r* of the crickets was the only sound. A sheen of cob-webs spread the grass. A hospital was to have been built here. The Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III, had laid the foundation-stone towards the close of the Second Empire. It now remained like a neglected good intention.

I reached the gate, groped for the bell-pull, jangled the bell. Many minutes passed before Costa opened the gate. His swarthy face gleamed in the light of a lantern he bore. He stopped, peered, recognized me and stepped back with his grand gesture. I went in and the gate was locked. He preceded me, swinging his lantern. Moths darted from the vines and lizards scurried from the path. Hugh was not on the verandah so I entered the house and opened the sitting-room door. He was not alone. A stout middle-aged man was drinking a liqueur by an open window. The "Englishman"! I had forgotten him!

"I'm sorry," I began.

Hugh nodded, then got up leisurely.

"Uncle," he said, "may I introduce Mr. Aubrey Broom the novelist. You don't need to worry. He isn't a brigand." He turned and went on: "This is my uncle, Mr. Lionel McBain, late of *The Grotto Princess*. No. 1 Company, I should add."

Hugh's uncle! I felt for a moment as I had felt on encountering Miss Gay. There was now excuse for my amazement, for Lionel McBain's letter had

preceded him but a few days. It was written from Brighton and had not hinted of a visit. *The Grotto Princess*, moreover, had merely begun its tour and there were no theatres in Corsica "where first-class companies with only the best players might come."

I stifled my feelings and looked at McBain, who had risen to acknowledge the introduction. I was not favourably affected. His clothes were certainly beautiful. He wore slate-coloured trousers, neatly pressed, and a black morning-coat which fitted him like a glove. His tie was black, and a small ring on his left forefinger carried a single diamond. His boots were of patent leather. So much for accessories, I thought; the man was another matter. His attitude was wooden. He stood as though at attention with his chest thrust out like a pigeon's; I suspected it of padding. His nails were polished, his hands white. He had close lips and a large impassive face, handsome in a fashion. His hair was dark, his breathing heavy. A sergeant might have called him "a fine figure of a man" but I felt I could never like him.

"Pleased to meet you, sir." He did not smile. His voice was strong and he spoke with dignity. I advanced and held out my hand, which he shook with precision.

Hugh said in a tragic tone:

"There's no reason to stand. Aubrey! Help yourself to a yellow *chartreuse*, if you want it."

We all sat down. The room was long and wide

and had three windows in a row. There were four doors, one at each end and two in the wall parallel to the windows. A great metal lamp swung from the centre of the ceiling. The floor was covered with linoleum but the dreary result was relieved by some white bear-skin rugs. There were two large tables and six basket chairs. The walls were hung mostly with English photographs.

There was a spare glass, for Hugh was drinking coffee. I poured some *chartreuse*. Hugh proceeded:

“Do you want a cigarette?”

He tossed me a crumpled packet without waiting my reply, then stared at his uncle.

“Do *you* want a cigarette?”

“No, no. My voice —”

“All right, then. I’ll have one.”

I chose a cigarette and returned the packet. We smoked in silence. My secret curiosity increased. The silence affected my nerves. To break it I remarked to McBain:

“Did you have a good journey?”

He smiled for the first time. It was a confident smile, meant to be seen by the most distant patron of a theatre. His teeth were regular. Gold flashed in them.

“It was rather jolly.”

Rather jolly! I found myself hating the man. The phrase might have suited a young fellow, an undergraduate full of diffidence and the joy of life.

It seemed insipid on McBain's lips. Did this creature of limelight, this darling of morbid school-girls, imagine himself a boy?

I concealed my disgust and went on:

"Very crowded, wasn't it?"

"Very. But tomorrow is exciting for the natives. It's the local equivalent of a bank holiday, is it not?"

I replied coldly:

"Not quite. It's the Feast of the Assumption, if that's what you mean."

"How quaint!"

Hugh interrupted:

"Aubrey is a Catholic. I can see nothing amusing in the fact. Things must look different, I imagine — from the standpoint of a No. 1 Company."

There was danger in the air. I did not know where to look. Hugh preserved an admirable gravity. McBain scowled. The expression, however, was gone in a moment, and he murmured that "there were many players who were Catholics, though of course it was abolished in England."

There was a pause before he went on:

"Lewis Waller was a Catholic. Did you know him?"

"No."

"Let me see! You write books? Have you met Samuel Jerry?"

"Never!"

"The chorus read him. They read him in the train on Sundays. That's where I saw his books."

His face suddenly darkened. He leant back, put up a hand to his throat and said faintly:

"It's the heat."

Hugh coughed impatiently.

"What damned idiots the people in England are! My uncle's unwell. Indigestion, overwork or something. The doctors have told him to rest and be quiet for a time. And they've sent him here for the cool sea-breezes. Sea-breezes!" He coughed again. "Why didn't they send him to stoke an Atlantic liner?"

I turned to McBain.

"A breakdown? That's bad. But you shouldn't have come here."

He nodded but did not reply. He was looking better, however, and presently sipped his liqueur.

Hugh had become engrossed with his own ideas. I knew him in his present mood. He stared at the wall and went on:

"It's astounding. I can't understand it. This country's absolutely unknown. If you told a Cockney that Corsica was in Peru, he'd believe you. They won't believe in scorpions because they don't exist in Tooting. And if you warn them of sun-stroke they think it's a joke. And if you mention brigandage—"

"Oh, come! We are not so bad as you paint us. I don't believe in brigands." McBain had almost recovered.

Hugh blankly regarded him as if resentful of the check.

"Then you ought to," he said bluntly.

"Brigands? Here at the present day? You don't mean it?"

"I do. Ask Aubrey. I don't mean they're as numerous as fleas. They're only in the hills — one or two. And they're busy with family quarrels. But I shouldn't advise you to contract a family quarrel. Not here."

McBain smiled with an air of superior knowledge.

"No, no. You won't succeed . . . you don't catch me," he murmured.

"Very well, then." Hugh grew indifferent.

There was another pause. McBain, I saw, was again distressed. He presently scrambled to his feet.

"I think I should rest . . ."

Hugh abruptly stood up.

"Look here! You can't stay in Bastia," he declared.

"No. Perhaps if I went to Ajaccio —"

"That's worse. Go to Vizzavona. There's a train at ten in the morning."

"Where?"

"Vizzavona. Oh, I'll write it down! It's nine hundred metres above sea-level. Mountains everywhere and forests of pine. Like Scotland, you know."

"Will you see me off?"

Hugh reflected.

"I can't do that, for I don't get up till eleven."

"I'll see him off," I put in. I addressed McBain: "You're staying at my hotel, I believe? We can walk down together and I'll see you off in the morning. Hugh's right. Vizzavona's the place you should stay. There's an excellent hotel."

Hugh shook his head.

"No. I'll go myself. I'll manage to get up for once and I'll call at the hotel by nine o'clock."

"Very well."

"Very well."

I moved to the door.

"You don't need to go," said Hugh. "Costa will escort my uncle, and there's something I want to say."

"Good-night, then." I nodded to McBain.

"Good-night, sir, good-night. And when I come back from the hills I shall be pleased to see something more of you."

They left the room slowly. I waited till the door was shut, then resumed my interrupted liqueur.

3

Hugh did not return for ten minutes. He then seemed abstracted as though a problem were vexing him. A second or two passed before he would sit down. He presently lit a cigarette. There was a long silence.

"Do you believe . . ." he began, then checked himself. A little smile came and went at his lips.

"What, Hugh?"

"I was going to ask if you believed in omens." He suddenly became reflective.

"No," I replied. "At least . . . Well . . . Perhaps I do. In Corsica."

"I quite see what you mean. Yes," he went on. "I think they're foolishness too — and yet I don't. You talk about a person, and a letter comes by the next post. Or you find yourself thinking of some one, and look up to discover he's watching you; of course it's natural he should be there, remember. Do these kind of things happen to you?" He looked at me coldly.

"Often."

"Often. Well. That's interesting."

There was another silence.

"Did you have a presentiment your uncle was coming?" I asked.

"What? Not the slightest." He proceeded appealingly: "Aubrey, I don't want to talk like a cad, but he's more of a bounder than ever."

I did not reply.

"Don't you think so?" he pressed me.

I said evasively:

"How can I tell? I've never met him before."

"Well, but you've met him now. Don't you think he's a bounder?"

"I don't like him. Remember, you've forced me to say that, Hugh. No. I don't like him. But I'm sorry for him. He's so hopelessly out of his element. And his health —"

"What's wrong with his health?"

I raised my shoulders.

"Overwork, indigestion or something. Your own words. Overwork, I imagine. Touring the towns of England must be hard at his age."

"Fifty-one, yes . . . Well!" He flicked his cigarette with elaborate indifference. "I think he's got some nasty disorder."

I started.

"You don't mean —?"

"Yes. I do . . . Sea-breezes! And his exit from *The Grotto Princess*, you admit that was sudden?"

"Sudden, certainly. But —"

"Oh, never mind! I wouldn't have spoken. Only I think that you ought to be careful. He's in your hotel and — well, never mind."

He impatiently stirred as though to dismiss the subject. I tried to dismiss it but did not succeed. The effect of wise words is never at once apparent. They are like pearls dropped into vinegar; they dissolve slowly. I found myself gradually believing that Hugh's was the only explanation. I felt ashamed, guilty. The explanation, if correct, was discreditable to Hugh's family. I saw his warning as it was: an act of self-sacrifice.

"No," he said suddenly. "I hadn't a presentiment of his coming but I have a presentiment now."

"May I hear it?"

"There's not the least reason why you shouldn't. It's probably rubbish." He took a deep breath. "Well. It's this. I feel as if my uncle's arrival

were very significant to me. I wish I could explain better. It's put me in a funk and yet I'm . . . well . . . thrilled not unpleasantly. A curious experience! It came suddenly the moment Costa showed him in. I wasn't thinking of him, hadn't thought of him for days. And then he entered the room and this feeling entered with him."

He dropped his cigarette into his cup, rose leisurely and said:

"Omens are absurd; I don't trust them. But I trust my ears. And if some one isn't moving on that terrace, I'll eat my own cigarettes."

He was so calm that I could not believe he was in earnest. I stupidly said:

"But no one ought to be on the terrace! Not at this hour of the evening!"

"Of course not." He went to a corner and lifted a stick.

"Perhaps it's Costa coming back."

"That's what I'm going to find out." He approached a window.

It was filled at the same instant by a figure, and Hugh started back.

"Good lord, Miss Gay!" he exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here?"

She advanced slowly. Her eyes were puzzled, her face was harassed. Her shapeless hat was at an angle and a few brown hairs straggled across her forehead. She was still dressed as I had seen her outside the Church of St. Roch, but the costume presented a crumpled aspect as if she had slept in

it. She wore no gloves and her thick shoes were dusty.

I rose incredulously.

"Miss Gay!" Hugh repeated. "How did you get in? Were you wanting to see me? Has some one attacked you?"

The muscles of her throat moved as though she were swallowing a crust. She advanced further and rested her hand on a chair.

"I came in by the other gate, the one near the gas-works."

Hugh was recovering, returning to the worldly manner which he thought the conventions required. He faced me with a melancholy air.

"The lock has been broken for months. A year has passed since I told Costa to mend it. I suppose he'll obey in another year."

I merely looked at him. Miss Gay sat down and murmured as an afterthought:

"You won't mind if I take this chair?"

"Of course not. I say! Will you have a liqueur? I'll get you a liqueur."

He went to a cupboard and searched for a glass. She followed his movements as if she were fascinated, and presently said:

"I've been out in the garden for twenty minutes, trying to go away."

Hugh poured out *chartreuse* and carefully brought her the glass. She absently thanked him, swallowed the contents at a draught. I am convinced she did not realize her actions.

A fit of coughing seized her, in the midst of which she shakily put down the glass. The spirit, if anything, heightened her distress. Two red stains spread on her cheeks, her eyes grew bright and restless.

"I couldn't keep away," she said with increasing excitement. "I tried, but it wasn't any use. Mr. Broom's right. Simplicity! I've got to be simple or live for ever in . . . in purgatory. For I can't keep away! If there'd been a train to Vivario tonight! But I had to come out, I couldn't keep away."

Hugh looked at me inquiringly.

"What does she mean?"

I cleared my throat.

"Miss Gay, I think, is referring to a talk we had. I met her tonight after I left you. I gave her some advice with which she didn't agree at the time. I fancy she has changed her mind."

Hugh slowly proceeded to study Miss Gay. She seemed oblivious, wrapped in her own perplexities.

"If there'd been a train to Vivario tonight!" Her brow was wrinkled. "I'd have gone home then and things would have seemed different. I'd have thought my decision irrevocable. I might have regretted, but it would never have struck me to change; I — I feel positive about that. But to stay in Bastia, in the same town! To know that the unnecessary suffering was dragging its course beside me! And a word from me . . ." She passed

her hand before her face. "She was only a yard or two from my rooms."

Hugh stepped forward and quietly put in:

"Exactly whom do you mean?"

"Oh, I know what you think of me!" cried Miss Gay. "But I don't care! You'll find that I count sometimes. I tried to go away from the garden. And before that I walked a mile into the hills—anywhere, anywhere out of Bastia. The Church was right. God cannot be more merciful than His Church. But oh, the demands of justice are pitiless! The priest said so. Justice and charity demand . . . so he said—"

"What priest?"

"I don't know. A priest at St. Roch's."

"But you're not a Catholic!"

"But I am! I wish that I wasn't! I wish I was bad enough to be really bad!"

"How am I concerned in this?"

"He told me I must speak. Something about Mabel Cain."

"What thing?"

"About her eyes," she replied distractedly. "She doesn't need to be blind. There, I've told you!"

Hugh was motionless for ten seconds. His lips then parted and the wrinkles at his eyes puckered as though he were about to cry. He went abruptly to a chair, sat down and presently found a cigarette, which he lit with a quivering hand.

Miss Gay, I thought, was exhausted. She plainly believed in her remarkable assertion. The effort to make it would thus be supreme, and a reckless peace would follow. She had attained tranquillity by braving the worst that could happen.

I was greatly excited. There was a sinking sensation at my chest and a pleasurable thrill of anticipation. I unconsciously stiffened my knees.

Hugh was the first to recover.

"Would you mind saying that again?"

"What?" She looked at him calmly.

"Mabel . . . About her eyes . . ."

"No. She doesn't need to be blind."

He leaned forward.

"You're sure that you are not joking?"

"Joking?" She laughed bitterly. I did not recognize her for a moment. She then proceeded in a tired voice: "Oh, don't bother me! I've had no dinner and the dust on the road was terrible. I—I'm really not accustomed to this sort of life. I may have led the life of a mother's help. But I'm not quite a tramp. Not yet."

He considered her before he went on:

"Well. I gather that your meaning is this: Mabel's blindness can be cured?"

"I think so. I'm almost certain. Oh, I'd better tell you and be done with it! While father was Consul I helped him as I helped you. There was a doctor in Bastia then, an Englishman named Hume. He didn't practise, you know—just lived

here for a time. He'd been a surgeon in a London hospital, but I think he had got into trouble. He gambled and drank too much wine."

"I remember him! He died in Algiers the year after I came here! We had letters from our people in Algiers!"

"Very likely. Well. Mr. Hume was always peculiar. He wouldn't be called 'Doctor'; just 'Mister.' And he often visited us. Father was sorry for him. I liked Mr. Hume. His lips were prim and his back was stiff, but he always had such kind eyes."

"But Mabel! Tell me about Mabel!" Hugh spoke in an agony.

Miss Gay's expression grew bleak. She replied gently:

"Yes. I'll tell you about Mabel. You're very fond of her, aren't you?"

"My God! I worship her. She's to be my wife. But what's that to do with you?"

"It has nothing to do with me." She paused. "Mr. Hume was sitting one evening in the seat where you are now. I was just a girl then, about twenty, I suppose. Well, Mr. Hume began to speak about Mabel Cain. She had just arrived in the island, a little girl with her father; and I remember I was shocked when Mr. Hume said she was blind. But he said more than that, told us she didn't need to be blind. She had only been neglected, he said." She wrinkled her brow. "Penetrated! That was the word. Mr. Hume

said that the eyeball had never been penetrated, and that only the lens had been injured. He insisted she could be cured by a perfectly simple operation. Father asked: 'Why don't you?' Then Mr. Hume held out his hand which trembled horribly. Father changed what he was going to say to 'Why don't you tell her father?' 'What's the use?' said Mr. Hume. 'He's no money. And London or Paris, that is where she'd have to go to be treated.'"

There was a long silence. Hugh soberly remarked:

"I believe it is absolutely true."

"Oh, I dare say it is!"

"Absolutely true!" He got up and began to pace the room. "What a gift! What a privilege to make her that gift!"

I thought it was time to interfere.

"Hugh," I said, "we don't know if it's true. Remember what Miss Gay told you. This man — Hume, I mean — was not reliable. He was a drunkard." I broke off. "You're sure of that, Miss Gay?"

"Quite sure."

"There you are, Hugh. Hume was a drunkard. And even if it were true then! Years have passed. It may not be true now. Time may have made the injury incurable."

Hugh halted to glare at me.

"Man, it's obviously true! A god couldn't be

so cruel as to leave her for ever as she is. A being like Mabel!" He resumed his pacing.

"Well, then! Suppose it is true. The expenses would be heavy. One would have to make sure before sending her for treatment."

Hugh turned on me savagely:

"She's going at once," he declared. "I'll send her at once if it takes every penny that I have."

I was filled with consternation.

"Hugh!" I exclaimed.

He sat down in excitement.

"Oh, don't you talk to me, Aubrey! I know all you're going to say, all you can say. It doesn't matter. I shan't be influenced. Not a scrap."

"But where will you find the money?"

"I've got two hundred saved. You know that."

"Yes. But . . ." I doubtfully glanced at Miss Gay.

Hugh regarded me defiantly. His face was white.

"But?"

"Well. We're not alone. I don't want . . ."

"Oh, Miss Gay doesn't matter! Go on. Finish the sentence you started."

I raised my shoulders despairingly.

"Very good. If you're willing . . ."

"Yes. I'm willing."

"Well. I was going to say that you know what the two hundred pounds represent. It means rest; you once said so. You hate this life. You want to

retire. You've been saving for years. And now! All your savings, for it will take them all and more!"

"That's not fair. That's illogical."

"It isn't illogical, Hugh."

"But it is . . . Look here! Didn't I send for you this afternoon?"

"I — I don't remember. Oh, what does it matter?"

"Didn't I send for you this afternoon?"

"Very well, then. You sent for me."

"What did I say?" He paused. "I told you that I was meaning to borrow a thousand pounds. And I was going to insure myself; you know that. So part of my two hundred would have been spent anyhow on the premium."

I expostulated:

"But that makes things worse! If you spend your money on sending Mabel Cain to London —"

"Paris. I'll send her to Paris."

"Paris, if you like . . . If you spend your money on sending Mabel Cain to Paris, you won't be able to insure. You'll have no money left. And then you won't be able to get the loan —"

"Which you advised me not to take."

"Of course I advised you not to take it! The whole transaction seemed risky; I said so at the time. But this —"

"Never mind 'this.' You advised me not to take the loan." Hugh jumped up and his voice grew shrill. "Good heavens! You exasperate

me, Aubrey. You first advise me not to take it, and then you change! Then you tell me I'm committing a folly because I don't take it!"

"Listen!"

"Rubbish! You should be glad. I say, you should be glad because you're getting your way. I'm not taking it — do you hear? I'm not proposing to take it."

"The loan was less of a folly than this gift."

"It wasn't."

"You're sacrificing all your hopes, all your chances. You're cheerfully proposing to ruin your every prospect. For whom? For a girl who doesn't —"

"Shut up or I'll kill you!" He advanced with a rush.

I laughed.

"And now you grow theatrical. Yes. The word is justified, Hugh. You're theatrical.— You profess to be disgusted with your uncle, but you're like him in many ways."

"I'm not! I'm not!"

"You're childish . . . and obstinate."

"Childish, am I?" He paused. "Mabel is going to Paris," he concluded from between his teeth.

"Very well. You know what this means."

"I know. I've counted the cost and I'm willing to pay, as they say in your books."

"They say nothing of the kind. The sneer's cheap and unworthy of you . . . But that's not the

point. I merely ask if you know what you're doing."

"Yes. I know." Hugh had grown calm, but his tone was grudging.

"All your savings will be gone."

"Let them go."

"You'll get no loan in return for them."

"I'll get no loan in return for them."

"And you'll have to postpone your marriage."

"Confound you, I know that! Do you think I'm not tempted? . . . All right. My marriage will be duly postponed." He was sombre.

I looked at Miss Gay. She was still weary and indifferent. Her expression, I confess, disheartened me. She seemed then like a prophetess sadly aware that my pleading was in vain, that destiny would take its course. Her hands rested on her lap, and her sensitive face was haggard.

I yet spurred myself to a final effort.

"Hugh!" I drew up a chair and sat down. "Has it occurred to you that Mabel Cain may have a word to say about this?"

"What do you mean?" He looked up. His tone was impatient, his expression nervous.

"Well. It seems to me you are disposing of her as though she were a bag of coals."

"How?"

"You simply regard her as the girl you've decided to marry; she's purely objective to you. Now. It strikes me you may also be objective to her."

He blankly regarded me for some time. His voice, when he spoke, was fretful.

"I — I can't understand neat phrases just now. I'm too worried. If you want me to understand you must speak plainly."

"I mean that she's a right to decide the conditions under which she will marry you."

"Oh, that! . . . Good lord! You don't imagine a sensible girl would choose to remain blind?"

"She might."

"I couldn't conceive a reason."

"Yes. You could, Hugh. You say that you love her?"

"I do love her."

"Then you're naturally anxious to marry her quickly?"

"Naturally. A schoolboy would agree to that."

"And even now! When the marriage is delayed by something that will make her happy! You are tempted to withhold it rather than suffer the delay?"

"I was tempted."

"If the 'something' was a means to your own happiness you wouldn't let it keep things back? You'd prefer to be without it than your wife?"

"Yes. I'm absolutely certain I should."

"Well then! Apply all I've said to Mabel Cain. You say and believe that she loves you as you love her?"

"Yes."

"But you propose to delay the marriage purely for her benefit?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think she may prefer to be without this benefit rather than without her husband?"

"My God! You're torturing me," cried Hugh. "Is there no satisfaction in anything?"

He resumed his pacing in great excitement. The jangle of the gate-bell shocked us like a voice from nowhere. Hugh became rigid. I rose involuntarily. We listened to Costa's slow steps without; he had returned unnoticed from escorting McBain to the town. A flicker of light danced uncertainly in the darkness beyond the windows. Costa, on his way to the gate, was passing the verandah.

I exclaimed suddenly:

"It is Mabel Cain!"

Hugh repeated:

"Mabel Cain?"

"Yes. You sent her a message to come this evening. I—I had quite forgotten."

Miss Gay was at last perturbed. She hastily rose and said:

"I think I had better go."

Hugh stopped her.

"No!" He looked at me. "I can't let you go either."

"What's your object, Hugh?"

"My future action is a problem, and Mabel is going to decide it. But this decision you must hear, for the problem was made by you."

4

The tension relaxed after a few minutes. Hugh strolled to a window, leaned on the frame and silently awaited events. I glanced at Miss Gay and raised my eye-brows in resignation. She was outwardly calm once more, she even sat down.

"This is going to be very painful." Her tone was quiet.

I did not reply for I had no means of consoling her. Steps and a murmur of voices sounded in the garden.

"This way, if you don't mind!" The order came from Hugh and was spoken sharply.

There was a pause, after which Madame Abbattucci's voice replied:

"It is M'sieur Cardinal, is it not? What would you, M'sieur Cardinal? Please to speak French."

Hugh obeyed.

"Through here, madame, if you please. Mount the terrace and enter by the window."

Steps sounded once more. There was a flicker of light. A broad beam suddenly cut the darkness as the lantern was turned on the window. Hugh drew back. Mabel Cain, followed by her duenna, then appeared on the terrace.

Mabel Cain, in the luminous glow, was bewitching. Her grey frock was partly concealed by a cherry-coloured coat. She was hatless but wore a picturesque mantilla after the fashion of the island. Her complexion defied criticism. She car-

ried a light stick and stepped with a caution which added to her daintiness.

I caught my breath at her loveliness. Hugh, I could see, was deeply moved. His eyes darkened. His expression grew reverent as though he were incredulous of his good fortune. He slowly advanced and took her hand. She allowed him to lead her to a chair. Madame Abbattucci, dressed as usual in black, followed unobtrusively. Costa appeared for a moment at the window, flashed his lantern and withdrew.

Mabel Cain was motionless but alert.

"There's some one here," she said sharply. "Who is it, Hugh?"

"That's why I called you, dear. There's Miss Gay, my former secretary, you know."

"Miss Gay?"

"And Aubrey is present because —"

"Mr. Broom here, too? Are you having a party?"

"No. I'm not having a party."

"Then what's the matter? Why are Miss Gay and Mr. Broom here?" Her tone was sharper still. I think she was afraid that her conduct to me had been revealed.

Hugh's reply reassured her.

"Nothing's the matter, or at least nothing unpleasant. I — I think I may say there is good news. Sit down, Mabel."

She obeyed with relief.

"Well. You frightened me." Her relief was

perhaps overwhelming. She loosened her coat and flung it apart over the arms of the chair. "It's hot tonight," she murmured in French.

Madame Abbattucci caught my eye and bowed formally. I envied her self-control. She had been dragged into a drama the language of which was unintelligible. She was yet disturbed not at all.

Hugh went on:

"You have met Miss Gay, Mabel?"

"Never."

Hugh introduced them perhaps a little too impressively:

"Miss Gay, I should like you to know my fiancée, Miss Cain. Mabel, Miss Gay is sitting on your right."

Mabel Cain vaguely bowed in that direction. Miss Gay merely looked at her, but not angrily; her expression was rather of perplexity.

Hugh continued in French:

"Listen. We shall talk French because of Madame Abbattucci. The affairs which must now be mentioned, they are truly stunning; and naturally madame will be glad . . . would like . . ." He broke off in English: "I can't talk French this evening! Everything's forgotten. My head's spinning."

Madame Abbattucci guessed his agony.

"Me, I go to study the stars," she quickly put in. She flitted to a window and faded in the darkness of the terrace.

Hugh sighed.

"Mabel," he went on, "I have something splendid I must tell you, and I find that I have no words. Your eyes . . . blindness . . ."

She sat erect and said in a low voice:

"Please don't speak of that."

"But I've got to. It's the point of the whole . . ." He paused. "Would you mind telling me again how you became blind? You once told me. You spoke of it so . . . gallantly."

She raised her chin. Her lips tightened and her face grew mobile.

"I was just a baby. Father had given me a kitten. One day, while I was playing on the floor, the kitten scratched my face. My eyes were both injured and I gradually became blind."

"Were you never taken to a doctor?"

"Never. We were terribly poor at the time. Father was playing in the orchestra of a cheap theatre in Marseilles." She leaned back suddenly. "Why do you remind me of those days? They were awful, cruel! I don't choose to speak of them."

"Do you remember a Dr. Hume?"

"Hume!" she frowned.

"Yes. An Englishman. Here in Bastia."

"Mr. Hume! . . . Oh, yes! Of course I remember Mr. Hume! He lived here before you came. Father was alive then. I was quite a little thing." She paused. "What about Mr. Hume? He wasn't supposed to be nice so we didn't see very much of him."

"Did he ever examine your eyes?"

"I don't know. How can I tell? I dare say. He sometimes spoke to me."

Hugh awkwardly lit a cigarette.

"Mabel," he said slowly, "I think . . . I'm certain that he did."

She again sat erect.

"You're going to tell me my eyes can be cured," she said in a breathless voice.

Hugh was overcome. There was a long silence.

"Oh, quick!" she went on. "I can't bear this! I'm breaking in pieces."

"Oh, Mabel," Hugh began.

He rose, crossed to her side and placed his hand on her shoulder. She shook him off with impatience.

"Quick! Tell me."

"Miss Gay will manage . . ."

Miss Gay seemed prepared. She spoke rapidly and without expression.

"It's quite true, Miss Cain. At least we believe it's true. My father was consul at the time, and Mr. Hume often visited us. I remember him saying you could be cured. I remember his exact words: that the eyeball had never been penetrated and that only the lens was injured. He told us you were just neglected."

"And all this time you kept silent!" I was amazed at the venom Mabel Cain could display.

"Yes." Miss Gay lowered her eyes.

My amazement vanished. Nothing, I reflected,

was surprising in Mabel Cain. It was natural, too, that a woman should seize upon a weakness.

Hugh put in:

"By Jove, I should never have thought of that! . . . She's right, Miss Gay. It's strange you should have kept silent."

"Indeed, yes." Mabel Cain grew excited. "I've a right to demand an explanation. Why did you never tell me?"

"Well. I didn't know you." Tears were in Miss Gay's voice. "I forgot Mr. Hume. I forgot you. Till . . . till you became engaged to Mr. Cardinal."

"And then?"

Miss Gay hung her head. I ventured:

"At any rate, Miss Cain, Miss Gay has told you now. At some sacrifice of her comfort."

"That's a fact," added Hugh. "We ought to be grateful. And as to the past—"

"Gratitude be bothered! I want an explanation, Hugh. Why did she keep silent? Why? I insist upon knowing."

"Oh!" said Miss Gay. "I wish you'd be quiet. There's no mystery. I—I was afraid to raise Mr. Cardinal's hopes."

A furtive satisfied expression spread Mabel Cain's face. I believe that she then guessed Miss Gay was her secret rival.

She presently went on:

"Never mind. Hugh's right. I am very grateful, Miss Gay. Forget what I said in a temper."

I was excited." She paused. "I'm excited still."

"And no wonder!" Hugh's voice was trembling.

Mabel Cain faced him.

"Sight! I've forgotten what the word means. Sometimes I think . . . But no. I've forgotten what it means."

"It means interest and passion and beauty."

"Interest, passion, beauty!" A thought struck her. "Are you handsome, Hugh?"

"No. I've often told you what I am. I'm an ugly beggar with a white face and a repulsive hand. You'll be revolted once you can see me."

She took him seriously.

"I shall never be that."

It struck me that I ought to interfere. Love-making might be pleasant to lovers. I found it trying and could guess how trying it must be to Miss Gay.

I brought the conversation to a practical level.

"Hugh wants you to decide, Miss Cain."

Hugh started and looked anxious.

"Yes. That's true. Mabel must decide."

"I?" She became apprehensive. "But I don't understand. What is there . . . What have I got to decide?"

Hugh went back to his seat. He then began with deliberation:

"Just this. It means an operation. Well. I don't need to tell you there's no one here we can trust. You'd have to go to Paris. Perhaps the

operation is impossible now, perhaps you would come back as you went. I don't believe that, mind! I'm positive your cure is practicable."

"Paris!" She grew wistful. "I've never been to Paris."

"Well. That's where I'd have to send you."

"Send?"

"Of course. You can't go to Paris without money. And the great privilege of paying, naturally it belongs to me."

"I never thought of that."

"Travelling alone will cost something. It's become dearer of late. And then there's your treatment. I don't know the price but I'm sure it will be dear too. Well. That's nothing. As I've told you, I have two hundred pounds saved. You shall have it all and — and a few hundred francs more. You shall go to Paris and win back your birth-right."

She reflected.

"Do you think the operation will be sore?"

"It may be."

She shuddered.

"Oh, I'm so frightened of being hurt."

I put in coldly:

"What nonsense, Hugh! The operation would not be sore. Surgeons are clever, now-a-days. They would use an anaesthetic. She would feel nothing — not as much as going to a dentist."

"Really?" She forgot we had quarrelled and turned to me eagerly.

"There isn't a doubt of it, Miss Cain."

"Then what is there to decide? Of course I shall go. Who would refuse to have sight?"

Hugh's face was crossed by a shadow. I was secretly pleased, for her action was what I had expected. She was showing none of the affection which Hugh had so confidently predicted.

He was determined, however, that she should prove herself all he thought her. He said calmly:

"I hoped and was certain you would go. Please keep to your decision. But you must first understand what it means. My whole inclination was to send you tomorrow, but Aubrey says I'm unfair. It's my duty to warn you that you can only go at a sacrifice."

"A sacrifice. Oh, but I think sacrifices are horrid!"

"So do I, Mabel. But still . . ." He set his teeth. "Sometimes there's an agony of pleasure."

"Now you're making jokes, Hugh. I do think it's awful of you to make jokes about this. What sacrifice are you talking about?"

"The postponement of our marriage."

"Oh!" She looked annoyed.

"Yes," Hugh went on. "I'm afraid it would have to be postponed. I meant us to marry on this thousand pounds that I'm getting."

"What thousand pounds? Has somebody given you a thousand?"

Hugh faced me with disapproval.

"Do you mean to say you haven't told her?"

I shook my head.

"But you called on her this afternoon."

"I merely gave her your message: that you wanted to see her tonight."

"Then I think it's very unfriendly of you, Aubrey. What's your motive? If I thought . . ."

Mabel Cain quickly interrupted:

"Oh, you mustn't be angry with Mr. Broom! We had so many other things to talk about. You see, he's your friend, Hugh. And I'm so glad he is getting to like me."

"But, Mabel! I can't understand —"

"I can! Don't you see? Mr. Broom wouldn't care to tell me. He would think that the news ought to come from you."

Hugh's disapproval vanished. He faced me again.

"I'm sorry, Aubrey. Yes. I see what Mabel is driving at." His lips quivered and he smiled slowly. "This delicacy, you know, was rather novel. But I'm glad you and Mabel are such friends."

I did not answer for I was too sad. I was able to comprehend Mabel Cain's solicitude. She would not, for obvious reasons, be anxious to discuss my visit.

"There, that's all right!" she cried. "And now about the thousand pounds?"

Hugh sighed.

"No one has given me it. I was intending to borrow. The terms, I considered, were satisfac-

tory; and I had every chance of repaying. But to borrow I was forced to insure my life. The premium would be about four thousand francs. I was to pay it out of what I saved. Well. I'm giving what I saved to you, so I can't pay a premium. And therefore I will get no loan."

"Couldn't you pay the premium off the loan?"

He shook his head.

"I don't think they'd do it. I don't think I'd like to suggest it." He swallowed impatiently.

"You see, it conveys an impression of financial unsoundness . . . I don't think it would be safe to do it."

"And so our marriage would have to be postponed!" She appeared thoughtful.

"Yes."

"I — I shouldn't like that."

"So Aubrey assured me."

"And he's quite right, quite right. I shouldn't like it at all. Not caring for you as I do."

I was now very attentive. The situation was nearing the climax. I knew that Mabel Cain was thinking only of self; she wanted to go to Paris. I also knew, however, that it was difficult for her to go without appearing indifferent; she clearly perceived the difficulty. How was she to reconcile her heartlessness with the opinion her lover held of her?

She presently repeated:

"Caring for you as I do . . ." Her lips suddenly grew determined. "I shan't go."

Her answer astonished me despite my knowledge of her unexpectedness. Was she still afraid of the operation, did she not want to go or was she wisely sacrificing a part lest she lost the whole?

Hugh was perturbed by the decision but pleased with the affection it implied.

"No, no, Mabel," he began. He paused. "Of course I understand your feelings. They'd be mine too."

She repeated:

"I shan't go. What did I say just now? I've forgotten what sight means; I told you that. Not that I shouldn't like to see. I should; it must be wonderful."

"Then go, go!" Hugh interrupted.

"No, Hugh." She shook her head. "For wonderful though it is, there's something more wonderful. I mean . . . marrying you."

"Mabel!" Hugh turned very white.

"Yes, Hugh, I'm serious and quite decided. I didn't understand at first. I just thought of the glorious joy of seeing. But Mr. Broom's right. It would mean postponing the marriage and I won't have that for a moment."

"But I don't care! . . . At least," — he looked pitiful, — "I shouldn't say that. I do care but I — I must positively refuse to be selfish. You mustn't think of me."

"I'm not thinking of you, I'm thinking of myself."

"No. You're not."

"I am, Hugh. Don't be a silly boy. Listen! It would break my heart if we had to put off the marriage. Well. It wouldn't break my heart, but I should be miserable the whole time. I've been counting the hours till — oh, till we were married. . . . I think you're very horried to make me confess to such a thing."

Hugh looked at her with reverence.

"You love me like that!" he murmured.

She nodded and quickly turned away.

"It almost passes comprehension. I think I comprehend." He lowered his head and finished gravely: "A good woman is God's rarest gift. I am God's debtor."

She bent forward and said convincingly:

"To have this operation would cost a lot of money. I should need all you've saved — perhaps more. Besides the travelling and the fees there'd be new dresses; I'd have to have those for Paris. Our wedding would really be put off. So I don't want the operation. Perhaps after we are married . . ." She paused. No one at first was disturbed, but the silence presently grew painful. "Oh, Hugh!" she cried at last. "Is there no escaping from sacrifice? I've just remembered," she whispered, "just remembered."

Her anguish was so convincing that some seconds went by before I realized she was acting.

Hugh was concerned.

"What sacrifice? What have you remembered, Mabel?"

"I must go after all."

"To Paris? Then you've decided . . ."

"I must have the operation."

"Of course you shall have it, if you want it. I urged you to have it, but you said —"

"I know, I know! And I meant it. But what I've remembered, it changes everything. Yes. It does."

"Go on."

"Hugh," she said quickly, "if my blindness can be cured it must be done before we get married; it must be done immediately, therefore. You must be brave and face things. I might die under the chloroform. And if we were married . . ." She stopped.

"I'm afraid I'm in the dark."

"Oh, can't you guess?" she concluded. "It might be unfair to a child."

I wanted to kill her but to congratulate her first. She had won magnificently. My hopes had risen when Hugh had asked her to decide. It seemed then that the decision would prove her undoing, but she had now turned it to her glory. She had gained her ends without suspicion of selfishness.

Hugh rose, restlessly strolled to a window, came back and halted by her side. He said quietly:

"I shouldn't have thought of that."

"You aren't angry?"

"Thank you for reminding me."

A flush of triumph showed on her cheeks.

"It's true, isn't it?" she murmured.

"It's logic."

"You must sacrifice and I must sacrifice. But not for ourselves or for each other. For the sake of the future."

"I'll get you the money tomorrow. And I think I have a little more. When is the boat to Marseilles?"

"Monday night from Ajaccio."

"Monday. Of course. Well. I'll get you the money on Saturday. Tomorrow's a holiday. I forgot."

"Will you come with me to Paris?"

He shook his head.

"We must save unnecessary expense. Madame Abbattucci would be going in any case. You'll be all right with her."

"Madame Abbattucci? But she's never been out of the island!"

"Then she's going to be out of it now."

I am afraid that I lost my head. Disappointment and anger had for long been trying to possess me. They suddenly evaded control, and I jumped up.

"Don't do this, Hugh!" I cried.

The look he cast me was dangerous.

"Be quiet, Aubrey."

"I — I can't be quiet. I've tried to be quiet for the last half-hour and I've nearly choked myself. You're spending all your money. It's quixotry, it's the most unselfish folly . . ."

"Be quiet, at once, will you?"

Mabel Cain was clever enough not to oppose me.

"Yes, he's right," she agreed. "Why should you give me this, Hugh? You'll make yourself unhappy for my sake. Let me give up the whole idea."

Hugh fell into the trap.

"My God! Make myself unhappy, you say! I'd be unhappy if you didn't go. I want you to get back your sight." He turned on me. "Do you think I'm a cad? Apart from my own inclinations, do you think I'd deprive her? A woman who cares for me as she does?"

"I want only to help."

"Do you think I'm a cad? Answer."

"I think you are too impatient. The matter should be well examined. You should write to a specialist, see if there is a chance . . ."

Miss Gay murmured:

"Thank you, thank you." The remark, however, was unnoticed, for Hugh shouted at the same time:

"See if there is a chance! You said that before. I won't listen!"

"Listen just to this, Hugh . . ."

"I won't listen."

"Then I won't speak." I turned away.

There was a long pause. Hugh presently said:

"Mabel, I wish I could come, but I can't."

She replied brightly:

"I shall think of you here all the time. I wonder! Shall I know you when I see you?"

He became more cheerful.

"By Jove, that's an idea! If I can't come with you, I'll come for you."

"Do you think you'll get more money?"

"I'm certain."

"How?"

"Lots of ways . . . Yes. I'll come to Paris when you're cured and we'll travel back together to Corsica."

"With Madame Abbatucci?"

He hesitated.

"Perhaps not with Madame Abbatucci. She won't be needed once we are married. If I get that money we can have the wedding in Paris."

Little actions are more significant than they seem. The dramatic value of Costa's entrance I have only now realized. It appeared at the time but a trivial relief to the heavy march of great events. Great events may pass unnoticed on tip-toe.

He entered without knocking as Hugh was concluding his sentence. Hugh coldly regarded him, but Costa was not perturbed.

"Good-evening, ma'm'selle." He pointedly addressed Miss Gay; Mabel Cain he ignored. His teeth flashed. "I've just come back from the station," he said, turning to Hugh.

"Why? I never ordered thee to go there."

"Ah, perhaps not! But I have brain." He

tapped his head. "The fat m'sieur who was here, he leaves for Vizzavona? Tomorrow morning, is it not?"

"Well?"

"I went off to the station. It is closed. The chief was shut up in his house. But I found him there and made him promise to guard a place for tomorrow."

"Oh! . . . Understood."

"In the first?"

"Yes."

"Heh, well! That walks. . . . The fat m'sieur who was here, he is m'sieur's uncle, is he not?"

"My uncle. Yes."

"Enough. I gave the name of M'sieur Cardinal."

"Thou art silly, then! He is my uncle, yes. But his name isn't Cardinal."

"Oh? Indeed? Well. It doesn't matter."

"No. I suppose not. I'll tell him. I'll explain. Now, get away!"

"Immediately, m'sieur, immediately." He again spoke to Miss Gay. "Ma'm'selle is well, I hope?"

"Very well, thanks, Costa."

"That's good . . . Tell me, ma'm'selle, how did you manage to get in?"

"By the window."

"But into the garden?"

"The little gate by the works."

"Goodness! I really ought to have mended that . . . Well, good-night, ma'm'selle."

"Good-night."

"You wouldn't like some coffee? No?"

"No, thanks."

"The coffee I make is very nice. Good-night."

He shuffled from the room.

"You never told me," said Mabel Cain.

"What? About my uncle? I'd forgotten him. He only came tonight and he's going straight to the hills."

"And you are glad?"

"I'm not sorry, that's a fact."

"Oh, well!" she decided. "I suppose I must meet him some day."

PART III

LOSS

CHAPTER I

ANXIOUS DAYS

1

MABEL CAIN left for Paris on the Tuesday following her decision. She was provided with a letter of credit and Mme. Abbattucci. This mode of expression is deliberate, not an affectation, for Hugh, I am convinced, regarded Mme. Abbattucci as a necessary accident to the journey. He similarly regarded the letter of credit but it seemed more important.

Hard words are forgotten hardly. Hugh and I remained the slaves of those spoken in his villa. A certain coldness was noticeable, a dangerous politeness when we met. I was resolved not to have a quarrel. Our difference, for example, could not be compared with that which succeeded his engagement. It none the less existed. I think he was as anxious to be natural as I, but saints alone can attain complete self-abandonment. We pretended to forget, grew skilful in pretence and at last forgot we were pretending! Perfect relations were finally restored by his letter.

It came one evening while I dreamed on my balcony. Much of it is irrelevant, so I quote but a part.

“And as to Mabel,” he wrote, “I can now tell you that my hopes are fully justified. Perhaps I should say *our* hopes, for I’m sure you have shared them with me despite the fact that you think I’m a blithering idiot. The pussy-cat didn’t succeed. Hume — and incidentally Miss Gay — were right, because the eyeball has never been penetrated. I had a letter this afternoon from the Abbattucci female. At least, she wrote it though Mabel dictated. How awful it must be to have to dictate your letters!

“Well, Mabel is going to be cured. She’s been prodded and microscoped by doctors till she talks like a doctor herself. How beastly it would be to have a wife who was a doctor! You’d always feel she was studying the symptoms instead of enjoying results.

“Forgive my coarseness and forgive the damnable style that I write in. The fact is, I’m a bit above myself tonight owing to this ripping news. I’m canned with the wine of success. Incidentally, that’s all the wine I’ve been able to get this evening, for Costa, I find, has let my cellar become empty. He’s a careless devil but I wish he wasn’t going to leave me.

“To come back to my muttons. Mabel says that the eyeball has never been penetrated. It is only the lens that was injured. The result, so they’ve told her, has been nothing unusual. It’s always the same — ‘traumatic cataract,’ they call it. Eh bien! That is what she now suffers from. It could

have been cured years ago, and it can still be cured. The operation is quite an easy one, and it's to be performed in a few days. She's in glorious health, so there's no cause for delay. She's allowed out but doesn't care to go — not yet. She prefers to wait till she can see. *See!* The word, when applied to her, sounds incredible. I could turn somersaults or leap the stars, but then, as I say, I'm canned.

“I've had a letter from my uncle by the same mail. I see from the post-mark he's still in Vizzavona but I can't be bothered reading it. To read his letter after the other one, well, it would be like chewing onions after smelling a rose. There's an elegant simile for your new book!

“No. Seriously, it's only worthy of a school-boy. I apologize. I'd send it to the old Maga, only they wouldn't print it. They wouldn't see the point. It would seem high-brow stuff to them. The humour of a school magazine consists mainly in using words in their wrong places. Come and look up soon — tonight, if you like . . .”

I am not ashamed of the tears which came to my eyes, but I cannot explain them.

2

“Hugh,” I said, “how much do you pay Costa?”

We were again sitting on the Consulate verandah. The patient mountains, like monitors, towered on our left. The blinding sea sparkled before us like the dream of a sanguine boy. I had just lunched

with Hugh. It was early afternoon, and even the birds were silent.

Hugh scrutinized me, then deliberately replied:

"I don't pay him. Real Corsican servants . . . You never pay them, you know. I owe Costa five hundred francs a year. That's in theory, of course. In practice I'm his banker; he expects it. He asks me for money when he wants it as though I were his father. He may bargain a little over the amount I give him. But if I told him there was nothing due he'd be quite content."

"What a system!"

Hugh seriously reflected:

"It has its drawbacks and advantages."

"More of the former than the latter. At least, I should think so." I paused. "Hugh," I continued abruptly, "I'm not moved by curiosity. The matter is just this: you'll have to cut down expenses."

"Must I do my own housework?"

"No. Of course not. And yet . . ."

"Yes? Go on, will you?"

"Well. I've lent you more than four thousand francs. I count this a privilege — that you should like me enough to ask it, I mean. But I can't lend you any more. It's a nuisance, but I can't afford it."

He was silent for some time, but at length replied soberly:

"You've been very decent, Aubrey."

"Nonsense. I've said I counted it a privilege.

But all the same . . . Where is it going to end, Hugh?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. In bankruptcy, perhaps." His tone was moody.

"What's wrong?"

He savagely broke out after another silence:

"Everything's wrong. I — I'm not fitted for this job, and yet there's nothing else I can do. I'm the worst consul that ever disgraced the service. I tell you this, Aubrey! The work here may be light but, such as it is, it's tumbling to pieces. It's—" He broke off and repeated: "Tumbling to pieces."

There was a pause.

"Well. It's a pity," I said.

He replied sulkily:

"Oh, of course you know the reason."

"Lack of your secretary?"

"Yes. She knew the work. More than that; she liked it. Her salary was nominal. That's why I can't afford to have another secretary."

"Mabel will perhaps take her place."

He looked at me sharply but my expression was under control.

"She'll never do that." He started suspiciously. "Mind you, I shouldn't allow her. That's what I mean. She will have to take care of her eyes. Always. There is bound to be a certain weakness."

"And reading your writing is trying?"

"Yes."

"I'm inclined to agree. So would Miss Gay, I

expect. I don't think her eyes are so strong."

"Aren't they?" He yawned with abandonment.

"I don't think so . . . But you're not interested?"

"Frankly, I'm not." He stifled a second yawn.

"Have you studied Miss Gay's character?"

"I? Good lord, no! There's nothing to study, I'm afraid. It's summed up in what I said: she likes working as a secretary."

"Perhaps she doesn't, Hugh."

"She must. Why would she do it? I didn't pay her enough. And my fatal beauty was certainly not the attraction. And as to Costa! You don't suggest she was enamoured of him, I hope?"

I replied seriously:

"Stranger things might be true. A woman's love is like a swallow. It builds where you least expect. . . . Still, I dare say you're right. Costa is hardly a snare."

"He puts off," Hugh reflected, "but he's really faithful. I can't understand why he's leaving."

"What did he tell you?"

"When you come to examine it, nothing. Said that he wanted to go to Corte because Bastia was too hot. Too hot!" Hugh spoke in derision. "He's stood it for fifteen years."

"What did Miss Gay tell you?"

"Well. She was more direct. She explained that my marriage was the cause of her departure. Something about not using this place as an office

when it once became a private house. I'm not sure she was wrong. Mabel doesn't like her, that's a fact. And I dare say her mother requires her."

"Her mother's claim is greater than yours, Hugh."

"Greater, yes. But not more pressing. Miss Gay was uncommonly useful. She not only helped me with my work. She — she actually managed Costa! He never disobeyed her."

"Have you ever talked with her in the dark?"

Hugh sat up.

"Look here, Aubrey, are you trying to be funny or vulgar? What the deuce are you driving at?"

"I'm driving at nothing — merely following an idea. The Consuls' Ball . . . I danced with Miss Gay then. We were on the terrace together, and it was fairly dark. It struck me then that Miss Gay's voice was beautiful. A stranger might have thought it was the voice of a beautiful woman."

Hugh interrupted:

"Well. She's not beautiful, that's all there is to be said. She's plain. Look at her face." He continued more soberly. "I'm sorry I put that so baldly. I didn't mean to insult her. . . . The fact is, I'm vexed and disappointed today."

"What's up?"

He laughed bitterly.

"Only good news. . . . Aubrey, nothing is more maddening than good news, if fate prevents you enjoying it." He grew calmer. "I've had a telegram from Mabel. The operation was ten days

ago and it's turned out completely successful."

"Ten days ago! And you didn't know?"

"Oh, that's nothing!" His voice was fretful.

"She wanted to surprise me. She waited till her convalescence was over. Don't you understand? She's up, all right, going about Paris, *seeing* Paris."

"Hugh, I know what this means to you. I — I really congratulate."

"Yes." His face grew still. "You're right. It means everything to me. I ought to be happy. I'm a selfish beast, I suppose."

"Are you not happy?"

He quickly shook his head.

"Remember my arrangement with Mabel? I was to join her in Paris the moment I heard she was cured. It seemed so easy, so temptingly easy then. There were a dozen ways of raising the money, I thought. But now! When the time to raise it has come!" He swallowed impatiently. "I'm wretched, Aubrey, wretched. Want of money is a tragedy; there's no use pretending it isn't. You can recover from a death or a broken heart. But a financial crash!" He shivered.

"Well. It hasn't come yet."

"Nearly, Aubrey, nearly. . . . Look here, I'm sorry to behave like this but I'm distracted. I've got to smile and be normal while all the time I'm living in flames. A ring of the bell makes me physically sick. I'm beginning to imagine things. I'm thankful for night. It's a blessed interlude between cursed days."

I closely studied him. His nerves were in a pitiful state. I exclaimed:

“This will never do!”

“No.” He sighed. “But what is the alternative, please?”

I shook my head.

“Have you answered her telegram?” I presently asked.

He had been trying to light a cigarette, but he pitched it down at my words.

“Great heavens, no!” he shouted. “How can I answer it? What am I to say? Congratulations? Yes. Of course. But she expects more than that. She expects me to say: ‘Am leaving for Paris’—something of the sort.”

“Say instead: ‘Regret cannot get away just now.’”

“Now you’re asking me to admit I’m beaten. I’m not beaten! I’ll pull through yet, manage somehow with flying colours!”

“But, Hugh —”

“With flying colours, I tell you! . . . Aubrey, don’t you understand? I told you once that I was tortured by my senses. Or in other words, I’ve imagination. Impressions lift me to heaven or drop me to hell. That’s where you’d put me if I took your advice. . . . Mabel’s in Paris, *seeing* Paris! I’ve planned and looked forward to seeing it with her. I’ve rehearsed conversations, imagined happy episodes. And now!” He broke off.

There were a whimper of impatience and a scuf-

fle at the window behind us. A small yellow dog threw himself upon me in an ecstasy, then drew back, planted his forelegs firmly and barked in excitement.

Hugh's eyes softened.

"This is Teddy," he said with assumed indifference.

I looked up when he spoke but my attention was smartly recalled. The dog took advantage of my movement. He leaped on my chest and endeavoured to lick my chin but I warded him off with my hand.

"Teddy!" Hugh remonstrated. He frowned, clapped his hands, repeated: "Teddy!"

The dog, wriggling appeasement, left me and bounded to Hugh, who prevented his return.

"My latest extravagance," he said, raising his eyes. "He arrived from England yesterday. But I'm afraid to acknowledge him after your lecture on finance." His white face grew earnest. "He isn't really an extravagance. I'm absolutely certain he'll be useful. A watch is needed here." His lips twitched. "Teddy watches too well, though. Don't you, old man?" He again raised his eyes. "Teddy is constantly barking. Corsica's too much for his nerves. . . . You don't blame me for buying him?"

"No, no, Hugh." I spoke quickly and my voice was perhaps unsteady.

Hugh sat up. Teddy promptly reapproached me. His nose examined my trousers.

"He's an Irish terrier," said Hugh blankly.

I nodded.

"Man," Hugh went on, "I am lonely. It — it's damnably lonely here. A dog is at least company."

"Yes, I know, Hugh. But I wish you had never bought him. Have you read Kipling's poem? His warning is meaningless to some but very appropriate to you."

"How?"

"Have you forgotten the British regulations? Six months' quarantine, that's the sentence on a dog entering England. It practically means that you can't take in a dog. Now you'll grow fond of Teddy. And when you go back to England — well, there will be a new tragedy."

Hugh's eyes grew inscrutable. He said at last:

"I shan't go back, I'm afraid."

"Not go back! What nonsense are you talking? Of course you'll go back. To a nice house in a cathedral town."

"Can you imagine Mabel in that house?"

His tone was dangerously quiet. I took the hint and kept silent.

"I can't," he said presently.

"Then what will happen?"

He shrugged his shoulders and yawned.

"Another consulate, I suppose. Perhaps in Chili, perhaps in the isles of Greece. Something romantic and therefore uncivilized."

"Will you like it?"

"Well. It won't be peace. I dare say I shan't

like it. But Mabel will like it," he quickly added. "It will be an achievement for her."

I started. He was echoing my thought! His damnation, her salvation; I had once decided the proposed marriage would be that.

I looked at the creature who had brought about this revelation. He was sitting on his haunches, his ears cocked, his head reflectively tilted. He sneezed passionately and placed his paws on my knee. I absently fingered his ears.

I suddenly reached a decision.

"Hugh, you can't go to Paris. It would be stupid."

His face darkened.

"Wait a moment," I went on. "I can still lend you four hundred francs. Do take it; I shall be happy then. And compromise. Meet Mabel in Marseilles."

He frowned, drummed on his knee with his shrivelled hand. The action affected my nerves. Strangers, I thought, must indeed be disturbed by that hand.

He rose, paced the terrace once, sat down again.

"Well. I'll do it," he said abruptly.

"Right. Then I'll —"

"On one condition. That you stay in Corsica till I'm married." He must have noticed my dismay. "Yes," he went on. "I know that's selfish. But I told you I was selfish. I simply must have some one I can trust. For the next few weeks. Some man, I mean."

"But you know, Hugh —"

"Yes, I know. I know you have your own life. Well. I won't keep you from it. The marriage will be very soon. It's going to be soon, I swear that."

I rapidly reflected.

"All right," I decided. "I'll stay."

"And you'll make the trip to Marseilles? There and back?"

I laughed.

"If I'm going to stay I may as well make the trip."

"Then that's settled." He rose abruptly.

"Where are you off to?" I asked as he entered the house.

"To telegraph Mabel. To say that we'll meet her in Marseilles."

CHAPTER II

THE MEETING

1

WE left Bastia a fortnight later. The hills were sparkling in the early sunlight as we entered the low-roofed station. A gesticulating crowd filled the platform, there was a babel of shrill voices. The train awaited us, its long line of small carriages well filled. We found places, however, in a stuffy compartment cushioned in dingy fawn. The side further from the sea was better, for it offered mountain scenery.

The train started, we threaded a tunnel and passed to a different land. The myrtles and orange-groves were gone. There flitted past instead a series of sturdy chestnut trees, the leaves of which had already begun to scatter. The mountains drew closer. A herd of shaggy goats, nibbling by a dusty road, added to the growing ruggedness. We were now fairly in the mountains. Stupendous peaks towered above us. We crossed wild ravines and paused at little stations where bold-eyed men with hats like brigands' sternly watched our passing. We rounded great U-shaped curves and climbed impossible gradients; the pace

grew slower. Corte, a grand town upon a rock, was now behind us. The sun was dropping westwards as we skirted a village and halted at Vivario station. . . .

Vivario is itself a village. A sandy road, bordered by a wooded slope, twines upward from the station to the Fountain of Diana. The streets are cobbled, and dark little shops are everywhere, mostly for the sale of provisions. There are two hotels, and a post-office entered by a narrow stair. The little church is built on a stone plateau, and its bells are centuries old. Mountain and hill-tops bristle above and below. They shimmer in the heat of day and glitter palely by night as the moon caresses them. A vivifying breeze comes down at evening from the hills, and the scent of the *maquis*, bitter-sweet, is overpowering.

Life in Vivario is quiet. The bells ring for the early Mass when M. the Curé chooses. I can yet see him if I close my eyes, a kind old man with white straggling hair. He walks supported by a black stick. His body is bent and his soutane flutters behind him. Those who meet him raise their hats, for there is little irreligion in Corsica. His parishioners are mainly peasants. Their lives pass midst reassuring sounds — the lumbering of carts, the bleating of goats, the contented crowing of cocks. Old men gossip by their doors at night, young men sing and promenade. . . .

We lunched late at the buffet on Vivario station. The meal was simple, hard bread, rich goat's-milk

cheese and coffee without sugar. The train started again. We panted up a gorge which at last became a tunnel. The air beyond was cooler. An immense forest of giant oaks surrounded us; it was broken by velvet glades, emerald and enchanted in the sunlight. Ragged pines succeeded the oaks, and a patch of snow gleamed on a distant mountain. There was a whitewashed house, some felled trees, a cascade. We crept into Vizzavona.

Vizzavona, with its gay hotel, was behind us. Our speed increased, the roar of the wheels grew louder. There were more oaks, then came a few olive trees. Terraces of vines, like giant steps on the slope of a hill, were glimpsed in a sheltered valley. We paused at a cross-roads platform thickly overhung with foliage. We presently saw the sea. A fairy bay, blue water bordered by violet hills, welcomed us; and we skirted a stretch of golden sand. There were a fringe of palms, some ochre houses, an orchard. We had reached Ajaccio; we had travelled a hundred miles—in a day!

2

“I wrote to Miss Gay, asking her to meet us,” said Hugh.

We were driving from the station to the Grand Hotel. The victoria, with an awning of grey canvas, was drawn by a pair of smart ponies. Our bags lay in front of us, and we could see beyond them the Cours Napoléon, a long road which led

straight from the station to the heart of the town.

I replied:

“Why did you do that?”

He became judicial.

“Well. I thought I had better. I’ve told Costa to send my correspondence to her. While I am away, I mean. And then there is my uncle. It struck me she could let him know I was away. Vizzavona’s just eleven kilometres from Vivario. She could send over a boy on a donkey.”

“Why didn’t you write to him?”

“Oh, I can’t stand the fellow! I couldn’t bear to write him, I’m afraid.”

“So you’ve brought Miss Gay to Ajaccio!”

“It isn’t very far.”

“And put her to the expense of staying the night!”

“Oh, she has old friends here! She once told me that.”

“You wrote to her to come here. Couldn’t you have written your instructions at the same time?”

“No. I couldn’t, Aubrey. There’s actually some business just now — a worry, if you want to know. I — I can only explain by word of mouth. She understands the business. I hardly knew about it till she left me.”

We reached the Place Bonaparte, swung sharply into the Avenue du Premier Consul. Our driver shouted a remark to some of his fellows waiting in rank to be hired.

“I see,” I said slowly. “Well. Of course if

the business is as private as you say. . . . Still, you could have seen her at Vivario as we passed."

He moved impatiently.

"How you worry, Aubrey! A regular nagger. . . . Does it not strike you that we had fifteen minutes at Vivario, that we had to eat, that a crowded platform is impossible for private conversation?"

"It does, Hugh. It also strikes me that if some one had to be put about, the some one should be you. We could have broken our journey at Vivario, stayed the night there."

He abruptly turned, looked at me curiously, grew speculative.

"Simply, you know, I never thought of it!" he said at last.

His nature was in many ways a child's, but I felt too angry to be tolerant.

"No. You never thought of it!" I said warmly. "You wouldn't. . . . Really, Hugh, sometimes I believe you are heartless. You can say what you like but the fact remains you've been selfish. You have no right to lay your commands on Miss Gay."

"Perhaps she won't come."

"Oh, she will come!" My tone was bitter. "She'll drop everything she's doing in order to please you. We shall find —"

"Honestly, Aubrey, I'd rather you stopped. One would think she was the woman you loved."

"I wish she were!" I retorted. "I wish that I had met her sooner!"

His face grew troubled but he did not reply. I could see that he thought I was exaggerating.

We dropped the subject and became silent. Our carriage entered the sanded drive which led to the Grand Hotel. An Italian garden spread around us. The hotel, guarded by a line of palms, crowned the slope like a great white palace. The air was soft and scented with tropical flowers. A sharp curve brought us to the entrance. We were now on the gravelled terrace between the building and the palms.

We paid and dismissed the driver. An indifferent porter with a fierce black moustache descended the steps from the glass hall and quietly picked up our bags. He then led us to the reception office where a fair-haired Belgian with charming manners was almost dancing with elation. He addressed us in perfect English.

“Good-day, gentlemen, *good-day!* You want a room? Two rooms? Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! You are leaving us tomorrow? Too bad! Now, may I trouble you to sign, gentlemen?”

A thought struck me as I put down the pen.

“Has a lady arrived?” I asked.

“A lady? Miss Gay? She arrived this morning. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! A business appointment with the consul? I fancy something of the sort.”

I turned to Hugh.

“She has done as I thought. . . . You had bet-

ter have your interview. I shall see you at dinner in one hour."

He nodded.

"Oh, all right!"

I immediately left the office and sought my room. I unpacked my bag, glanced at a paper but found I could not settle; the whole situation was unsettling. I planned some scenes for my book. Hugh's room was adjacent. My time was occupied till I heard him slamming the door. I then descended to the terrace for a glass of vermouth and a cigarette. Miss Gay was sitting by a little wicker-work table.

I perforce joined her. My first impression was one that she had changed. Her eyes were less worried, she in consequence seemed more girlish. There had vanished, too, a certain air of dissatisfaction. I searched for the word that would describe her. Courageous; that was it! She was calmer, nobler, more natural. Her quiet sincerity was refreshing after Mabel Cain's sprightliness. She was dressed in white, her manner was assured, her plainness, I decided, was piquant. She was reading an English novel but she put it aside with a delicate air of welcome.

She smiled as she offered me her hand.

"It seems quite a long time since I saw you."

"Yes," I said. "Yes, it does. But time isn't a dimension. It's . . . an emotion, if you see what I mean."

She nodded.

"Few would see," I went on. "What I said just now, it would seem a sickening affectation — or else they would say I was mad." I paused. "Are you staying the night in this place?"

"In the hotel? No. I'm with friends. I'm just passing the time for a few moments till Mr. Cardinal comes out. He's getting a paper that he wants me to take home. This book I was reading, I got it from the hotel library."

She handed me a collection of Washington Irving's tales. I was surprised. Their elaborate imagery I should hardly have expected her to enjoy. I revealed something of my thought.

"No," she said slowly. "And yet I'm not sure. Why shouldn't I enjoy them? His intention's . . . serious, would you say?"

I agreed.

"Well. He deserves serious appreciation. What does it matter if I'm frightened or shocked or unsettled? That's only my littleness. It's only frivolity that's shocking, really. Genuine fun or genuine tragedy is . . . well, you know what I mean. All life is interesting, and life itself can never be shameful. It's only lately I've discovered that."

I impulsively broke in:

"Miss Gay, you have very much changed!"

She laughed with but a touch of embarrassment.

"Have I? Do you think so?" Her eyes suddenly grew steady. She bent forward. "Oh, I know I've changed! Mr. Broom, I want to tell

you quickly before Mr. Cardinal comes down. You were right. Thank you ever so much."

I was bewildered.

"And I was rude," she went on. "I'm very sorry I was rude. But you understand? I'm sure you'll forgive me."

"Miss Gay, I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Don't you? How silly of me! I'm trying not to be silly. . . . I'm talking about the advice you gave me. The night before the Assumption, when you met me coming out from Confession."

I understand.

"I'm glad you followed it in the end, glad it solved your . . . difficulty."

She sighed and shook her head.

"Oh, that! That will never be solved. No. It didn't solve my difficulty, I'm afraid, but it lifted me above it. I haven't got what I wanted. But I've got something else which I know is very wonderful. As to what you discovered, perhaps I shall talk of it some day. But not yet. I—I still care." She bent her head for a moment.

There was a pause. I then said:

"Did you follow all my advice? It's a blunt question, but . . ."

"It's a very natural question, I think. . . . Yes. I followed all your advice. I told myself: 'You've behaved like a mean wretch. There's no use pretending and making reservations in your favour. Only one thing's to be done. Go on from

now like a child wanting to be good.' You know, Mr. Broom, the child would implicitly obey."

"It's difficult."

"That's where you're wrong. I thought so too. But it's easy, the easiest thing on earth once you have made a beginning. . . . I went to the priest with my mind made up. I would tell him exactly the hypocrite I'd been. Without emotion, of course. 'Here I am,' I should say. 'I've become a Catholic and I don't believe it in the least. What shall I do?' "

"Did you say that?"

"There was no need. I found that to make myself good enough to be able to say it . . ." She laughed. "That's complicated, but you'll see what I mean. . . . I found, then, that to make myself what I said, was to *be* a Catholic!" She broke off: "Here's Mr. Cardinal! Of course you will never say a word . . ."

"Never, never!"

"Is he well? He's not looking well."

"He's worried. And besides I've been lecturing him. It was a shame to summons you as though you were his paid servant."

I thought she had failed to attend, but she said in a moment:

"I'm glad. It shows he at least thinks of me."

I remained silent as the subject of our discussion approached.

3

Hugh and I were late retiring that night. He was in a good temper, brought about by the fact that he had shifted responsibility to Miss Gay. We sat on the dim terrace while the melancholy frogs croaked in the garden below and the sleepy birds rustled the palm leaves above. We discussed twenty subjects and as many cigarettes.

I rose betimes on the following day. We did some shopping and then drove to Calenche, a little village to the south. It was four o'clock when we returned. There was time only to pack our bags, for the hotel wagonette awaited us. We rattled past the Café d'Ajaccio, through the Place des Palmiers, along the Quai Napoléon to the side of the busy mail-boat.

A two-berthed cabin had been reserved, and I was so tired that I took possession and immediately fell asleep. I did not waken for dinner, was conscious of nothing till Hugh shook me and I opened my eyes to find that the cabin was sunlit. I dressed quickly and went on deck. We were already landlocked, entering Marseilles. The Byzantine cathedral was to the right. The grey town was ahead. Wooded villas sparkled on the heights beyond, while Notre Dame de la Garde, on the hill, seemed a living power, conscious of incoming ships.

I withdrew, hastily swallowed my coffee and bread. Bells were ringing, men shouting, beams creaking when I next appeared. We were slowly mooring by a projecting quay. The gangways fell

with a clatter. Perspiring porters invaded us. There was the usual stampede, the usual delay at the Customs. We at last squeezed through a small door and found ourselves in the blazing street. Our porter staggered behind us, attempted an overcharge, argued fluently, was vanquished. We sank exhausted upon the dusty cushions of our carriage. The driver spat and whipped up his horse.

Marseilles! A meeting-point of east and west! It does not delight but it fascinates. Who has not thrilled at his first experience of the place? It is insolent, splendid, secret. It smells of the east, of the desert. A lazy breeze, strangely disquieting, drifts down the Cannebière. The crowd is a pageant of Frenchmen, Jews, negroes, grave Arabs in their white *burnous*. . . .

The Hôtel du Louvre is unique. An inconspicuous building fronted by shops, it yet outrivals European hotels. An arcade runs from the street to a glass-roofed hall which is always busy. It is a rendezvous for men of action. Englishmen predominate — sea-captains, Civil Servants, soldiers on their way to Malta, Egypt and India. The French they speak is hard to recognize, but they speak it seldom. The courteous waiters are observant and appear to understand intuitively.

Madame Abbaticci awaited us here. Her beautiful French seemed strange in this outpost of the British Empire. She greeted us with reserve, then turned to Hugh.

“Ma’m’selle is well, m’sieur. She is upstairs.

I have not permitted her to meet you here. It was possible, I believed, you might wish to see me alone."

Hugh's face was ghastly. He had been inquisitively glancing into every corner. The occasion was for him an ordeal. I think he had feared lest Mabel Cain were observing him but Madame Abbattucci's explanation relieved him.

"Madame is as kind as usual," he murmured.

"That was my belief. Would you wish, m'sieur, that I gave an account of expenses? They have been incredible, heart-breaking! Paris is only for millionaires. There are no chestnuts, nothing but meat. And the restaurants! They do not observe the fasts! And the hotels! One can stay a week at the Grand Hotel of Ajaccio for the price of a day in Paris. This hotel here, I am afraid it is dear too."

"That leaves me unmoved. Be assured, madame. All you have told me, it is only what I have expected."

"It is the affair of M'sieur. Then if you will dispose yourself, I shall bring ma'm'selle."

Hugh stopped her as she was turning.

"Tell me. She is really well?"

"M'sieur, it is truly wonderful. She sees everything." There was a pause. "Perhaps she sees too much."

"What do you mean?"

"We are used to sight but to her it is a great experience. That is to say, we are adults while

she is but a child. An adult may drink a large tumbler of wine. If one gives it to a child, she becomes excited, do you see? ”

“ I don’t. . . . I am on thorns.”

She said quickly :

“ I shall seek ma’m’selle.”

We found ourselves alone. I surveyed the hall. A couple of chairs caught my attention ; they were slightly apart and a writing-table helped to seclude them.

I pulled Hugh’s sleeve.

“ We’d better go there.”

He followed me in silence. His face was haggard and white, he went helplessly like a man walking in a nightmare.

“ Sit down,” I told him.

He obeyed. I glanced round till I saw a third chair. This I drew up. The practical action brought home the situation to Hugh.

“ Aubrey,” he said, “ this is hell for me.” His eyes were tortured. He spoke from between his teeth.

I attempted to reassure him.

“ It’s only nerves, Hugh. I admit it’s a trying moment.”

He shook his head.

“ It’s suspense. I feel like a prisoner waiting to be told his sentence. Or — or an ox waiting to be inspected. Fancy being engaged to a man and not knowing what he is like! ”

“ You could make a comedy.”

"Yes. You could *make* a comedy. But the situation itself is tragic. Oh, it's tragic!" He half rose. "My God, man —"

"Quiet! There she is."

"Look here, I — I can't face her all at once. You see her. Tell her I'm coming presently."

"Hugh, sit still! Control yourself."

I prevented him rising. Mabel Cain and Madame Abbattucci approached. The latter was very considerate. She remained with her charge only till our identity was unmistakable. She then rapidly withdrew.

Mabel Cain halted before us. I looked at her. Madame Abbattucci had assured us she was a child. The word, I thought, might be apposite in a metaphor; it was not apposite in general. She was less child-like than ever. One of her double personalities had vanished. I was looking upon a handsome young woman. Her eyes were deep with impressions. She might still be pensive and sentimental but she had awakened to the meaning of passion.

Hugh slowly got up. His shrunken hand he pitifully concealed in his coat. His lips were dry, his eyes hard. He began shakily:

"Well, Mabel . . ."

She darted forward and kissed him.

"Hugh! Your voice is the same as ever. Of course it would be! But you just spoke in time. I was going to kiss Mr. Broom. . . . This is Mr. Broom, I suppose?"

I rose and nodded coldly. A flood of relief conquered Hugh. He laughed till his eyes were wet and a few of the visitors turned.

“Do — do you wish he'd been me?”

“No. I don't.” She blushed. “For Mr. Broom doesn't like kisses.”

They were both dangerously excited. Her allusion was not only tasteless but very indiscreet. Had she become facile, I wondered?

Something happened before I had time to intervene. Hugh's self-assurance was so restored that he forgot to conceal his hand. Mabel Cain noticed it suddenly, and her eyes grew wide and affrighted.

“Oh, how awful!” she exclaimed.

A dramatic silence followed. Hugh's muscles grew tense, and the colour which had come to his cheeks faded. He awaited her next remark.

“That's the — the hand?”

“Yes.”

It fascinated her for a moment longer. She then shivered. Her colour slowly came back. She sighed and said:

“I — I can't understand why suffering should be in the world. Justice's unjust. It — it's a shame, I think.”

The speech was inconsiderate but Hugh received it with a thankfulness that made me wince; he had evidently dreaded worse.

“You're not going to — to chuck me, then?”

“Chuck you?” She suddenly flushed. “Why, how mean of you! I've never considered such a

thing. I'm only sorry for you. Sorry. . . . Hugh, you're not being kind." She sat down quickly. "You know, I can't realize things yet. I'm living in a dream. Or at least I'm only beginning to realize. Sight, sight! Oh, it's wonderful, it's life! I've been dead and come alive again. Everything's glorious. Don't you think so?"

Hugh also sat down. He was rapidly becoming himself. Presently he lowered his eyes and broke into his slow smile.

"Everything's rather beastly. At least I'm inclined to imagine so."

"It isn't, Hugh! Look over there."

He obeyed. A large bouquet of violets lay on a table by a lady's side.

Mabel Cain went on:

"My head swims and a pain comes in my throat when I look at that." She assumed carelessness but there was a tremor in her voice.

Hugh moodily regarded her.

"You're very like me."

"Am I?"

"Yes. You are. . . . I'm susceptible to impressions too. They carry me away. But you'll soon find out that the result isn't always pleasant."

"Now you're being horrid again. I don't like you."

"Oh, my dear, I'm being practical. Facing an ugly truth for once in my wretched life." He impatiently stretched his right arm.

"Life isn't wretched."

"Mine is."

"Why?"

"I've seen too much."

"And I haven't seen enough! . . . Come, don't let's be miserable! It's our first day and life isn't very long. And besides, there's something I want to speak about. That hand."

Hugh shrank as though from a blow. She perceived the effect of her words.

"Oh, you're cruel!" she went on. "You think that I'm talking of your left hand. Hugh, you'll make me believe you don't love me. You really will. As if I would speak of such a thing!"

"But you said —"

"It's your right hand I mean."

"What's wrong with it?"

It rested on his knee. He studied it blankly, then shook his head.

"What's wrong with it? I see nothing unusual. Regulation size, five fingers." He smiled. "Unless you think it needs manicuring."

She took him seriously.

"Yes. I do think so. I noticed that too."

"Too?" He anxiously straightened his shoulders.

"Of course. But that's not what I meant. It's these three fingers. All . . ." She turned to me suddenly and pointed at a sunbeam. "What is the name of that colour?"

"Golden?"

"No, not golden."

“Orange?”

“Yes. That’s what I want.” She again faced Hugh. “Your fingers are the colour of oranges. Honestly, they are.”

“I suppose you’re right.” He looked crest-fallen.

“Does smoking cigarettes do that?”

He replied with exaggerated earnestness:

“Mabel, I assure you! I shall never smoke another cigarette.”

She smiled and blushed. He went on:

“You’re quite right. It’s a beastly habit. My fingers are frightful. I’ll stop.”

I ventured a remonstrance.

“Tell him not to, Miss Cain.”

“Why? Why should I do that?”

“Well. I daresay he smokes too much. But it isn’t a crime.”

“Shut up, Aubrey,” muttered Hugh.

“And,” I went on, ignoring him, “moderation is better than abstinence. To give up smoking is harder than you seem to think.”

She set her lips, and her eyes grew obstinate.

“Hugh has promised and I’ll hold him to it. You don’t understand, Mr. Broom. The colour of his fingers hurts me.”

I began warmly:

“But be tolerant. At least you used to be tolerant —”

“I used to be blind. And please don’t remind me.”

"It is only Hugh who has kept you from being so still."

"Will you shut up?" Hugh again interrupted, this time more savagely.

I pressed my lips.

"I know it quite well," she replied. "I don't think I need to be reminded." She turned to Hugh. "I'm grateful — really. Really and truly."

"For God's sake, don't be grateful! It isn't your gratitude I want."

"Of course if you'd rather not stop . . ."

"But I have stopped! I told you so! I care for nothing but you. I — I'm obsessed with you. Your face is always before me."

Mabel Cain was appeased. Her expression grew sad. She crossed her leg, bent forward and appeared to reflect. A thought suddenly struck her.

"I'll have a cigarette. Just to tease him," she added.

I again thought her inconsiderate but showed nothing of my thought. The young are always inconsiderate. I gravely produced my case. She studied the contents and smiled.

"Aren't they pretty all in a row?"

I did not reply. She chose a cigarette, and Hugh offered her a match.

"You've learnt to smoke?" he inquired.

"Just for fun. About three a day."

I stood up and said:

"Well. I shall leave you. I expect you have plenty to discuss. And I shan't see you till din-

ner. I'm going to be a tourist for the day."

Hugh also stood up.

"I'd rather you waited if you don't mind. I won't keep you a moment."

"What's up?"

"I'm going to my room. There are fifteen packets of cigarettes that I managed to get through the Customs."

"What's that to do with me?"

"Well. You can have seven, and Mabel can have seven, and the odd one we'll give to the first waiter who comes near us. . . . You know, when you make a resolution it's better to fulfil it at once."

I sighed and sat down. Hugh would always be spectacular.

"Please hurry up."

"I shan't be more than five minutes."

He awkwardly crossed the hall. Mabel Cain watched him till he entered the lift. I said reflectively:

"Marseilles without tobacco is like marriage without love."

Her cheeks grew pink and she seemed uncomfortable. She glanced at me doubtfully, seemed on the point of speaking. Her expression was one of apprehension.

She again assumed carelessness, but there was again a tremor in her voice:

"Mr. Broom, you've been studying me. Of

course I don't mind that. But you might as well tell me the result of your . . . oh, of your studies."

I looked at her in amazement. There was now appeal in her eyes. She said more earnestly:

"I — I really want you to tell me."

Her candour, I decided, was at last genuine. She went on before I could speak.

"I don't know what I am."

The sentence embodied the impression given by the interview! I understood what had happened. Nothing remained but to explain her to herself.

"You are now the person you would normally have been at sixteen. If you'd had your sight, that is to say. But don't let that trouble you. It isn't permanent. It's only a stage of transition."

"Seeing? That's what's made me . . . ?"

"Seeing. Hugh once warned you. You asked him what sight meant. He replied —"

She put in quickly:

"I remember what he replied."

"And that remark shows he was right. You're nervous of Hugh, nervous of me. You've been half afraid of me all the time you were talking. Shall I tell you the reason?"

She nodded.

"It's because your imagination has been roused."

She broke in:

"I'm just fascinated, I think. Confident and terrified and despairing."

"Exactly."

"Then what shall I become?"

"The result of what you see. I'm greatly afraid that is true."

"Why 'afraid'?"

"Well. For Hugh's sake."

"I must live for Hugh. That is my future."

A challenge and a promise and a plea! The remark was significant of these. Yes. She had awakened to passion; my first impression was confirmed.

I did not pursue the subject, and Hugh's return released me from further conversation. I found my hat, went out upon the busy street. My walk was hardly a success for I was so abstracted that I collided with three people. The reason of this abstraction was simple: I was trying to see as it were for the first time. I became uneasy and desisted. The effect upon my nature was alarming.

CHAPTER III

THUNDER FROM THE HILLS

1

“WE are chasing the moon,” said Hugh. Our ship was gliding over the dark Mediterranean. Nice lay astern, Corsica ahead. The sea was a lake though a warm breeze fitfully skimmed the deck. The glowing moon, like a great lantern, was before us; and our track led down a path of silver.

The ship was silent. We stood at the prow of an upper deck, alone save for three men who slept deeply behind us in distinctive attitudes of abandon. Some piled rafts were partly covered with tarpaulin. There was a certain solemnity in the muted throbbing of the engines.

We had decided on this route only at the last moment. The journey from Marseilles had been simple, but difficulties had arisen in Nice. The service to Bastia was intended primarily for cargo, so passenger accommodation was allotted weeks in advance. Hugh, however, had been able to influence the captain. Mabel Cain and Madame Abbattucci had berths, while Hugh and I were travelling as deck-passengers.

A door slammed in the distance. Hugh repeated his remark.

I replied:

"What if we catch it?"

"We couldn't hold it. It would spurn us. Moons were not made for men."

"What then?"

"Then we should be moonstruck. At least, I suppose so. It's the only enviable condition." He yawned and concluded: "What absolute rot we are talking!"

"Perhaps we are moonstruck already."

"Perhaps."

There was a long silence. Not an incident happened to disturb it. The poignancy of the night was extreme. A spark, red and angry, gleamed far ahead on the horizon.

"What's that?" I exclaimed.

"A fire upon Cap Corse."

"But it's miles away!"

"Sixty or seventy."

"What does it mean?"

"I've no idea. Some nameless creature, hunted by his own destiny."

There was another silence. A child wailed on the lower deck behind us. Hugh's reserve was dispelled. He said in a slow voice.

"What a pain and pleasure is passion! I hate it mostly but on nights like this I love it. The memory of this scene will long console my disappointments. I shall close my eyes and recapture

something of this night. Gold is less precious than the boon of witnessing a sunset."

"Simple pleasures," I said softly.

"Simple pleasures!" He grew thoughtful. "Yes. My temperament, then, has compensations."

"It depends how you use it. Will is greater than temperament."

"Look at that sea," he suddenly exclaimed. "It's liquid indigo, with threads of flame."

It was the last remark of our fragmentary conversation. He stared at the sea but a little longer. His troubled expression slowly became resigned. A fit of yawning overtook him. He moved, selected a spot, lay down on the hard deck. I watched him for half-an-hour but sleep in the end conquered me. I sat on a box, bowed my head. The breeze cooled me and I dozed fitfully. My dreams were strange, so I was glad to be roused by the dawn.

I was stiff but refreshed. I rose cautiously, lit a cigarette, lent on the clammy rail. The east grew rosy, the sea grey. We were now passing Cap Corse. A lilac mist rolled up from the mountains. Vine-yards and olive-groves were revealed. The world was carmine for a wonderful moment, then the sun, yellow and exultant, leapt above the edge of the sea.

Hugh, I discovered, had joined me.

"What a night this has been!" he declared.

I looked at him.

"It has made you happy?"

"Almost that. . . . Aubrey, my heart has risen with the sun. I feel excited as if bright things lay ahead of me. This night has been a revelation and a holiday. I think . . ." He reflected. "That my days may hold something yet."

The conclusion, I considered, was lame.

"Something what?"

"I don't know. Something pregnant, I suppose."

"Well. May those days be many!"

"I wonder."

A lithe girl appeared on deck. She was beautiful, startled, unconscious of her own picturesqueness. The blaze of the dawn bewildered her for she had evidently just awakened. Our nearness to the coast bewildered her too.

"Oh, my God, we are just arriving!" she cried.

The silence had for a moment been intelligible. She had responded as naturally as to the voice of a long-lost friend. . . .

The episode seemed to me important. Her remark fell like the curtain to a perfect play.

2

I was calling on Hugh a week later. It was mid-afternoon. A sultry stillness gripped the island like a frost. A great purple cloud was lurking behind the mountains, its fiery rim partially visible, its shadow darkening the valleys. Occasional thunder rolled in the distance.

The bell rang. We were silent till we heard

Costa plodding down the path to the gate. Teddy, whom the ring had thrown into a paroxysm of barking, stopped abruptly and pricked his ears. Hugh yawned, rose deliberately, crossed to a window.

"Any one in particular?" I asked.

"My dear man, how the devil do I know? I don't see through a hedge. It's my uncle," he suddenly concluded. His tone was so disgusted that I laughed.

He turned, hesitated, abruptly strolled back to his chair. A thought struck him and he glanced at his watch.

"I can't understand . . ."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing! Only the train's been up to time. And my uncle must have come straight here. From the station, I mean."

He had grown nervous and irritable. Habit sent his hand to his right pocket. It fumbled for a moment, became still, was withdrawn.

I bit my lip and looked away. His need of tobacco was urgent but I dared not offer it. He had ruthlessly abstained from cigarettes since that morning in Marseilles when he had made an unreasonable promise.

Teddy again barked as a step sounded in the hall. His master wheeled on him.

"Be quiet, damn you!"

Neither Teddy nor I was intimidated, for Hugh's ferocity was merely part of his pose, a bad habit

which he loathed but could not escape. Hugh in private consistently spoiled Teddy. He would sit for an hour with the latter on his knee; I had frequently found them so.

I rose, picked up Teddy, deposited him on the verandah and shut him out. McBain entered as I returned but I found it difficult to observe him. The sun had reached the fringe of that ragged cloud, and the light was suddenly dim. The long room was brown and deceptive.

I noticed, however, that his sojourn in the hills had not improved his appearance. His face was less impassive and there was no crease to his trousers. His hair was rumpled, his chin silvery as though he had forgotten to shave. His glance was sharper. He appeared thinner but not a whit less impressive. These changes, I reflected, might all be due to an exhausting railway journey.

He looked up, first suspiciously at me, then keenly at Hugh. The latter greeted him with a nod of exaggerated coldness. There was an awkward pause. Hugh finally said:

“So you’ve got back? . . . Well. Better sit down. Are you thirsty? Do you want tea or anything?”

McBain shook his head and slowly moistened his lips. He then breathed deeply. The faint perfume of stale cigar-smoke and wine presently became perceptible.

“How are you?” Hugh went on, still with elaborate indifference.

McBain sighed.

"I'm very well. Yes, thank you, boy. I'm very well indeed." He approached me deliberately. "And you, sir? I hope that you are fit. We meet where we parted, don't we? There is coincidence in life, coincidence . . ."

I murmured some platitude. He honoured me with his smile, fleeting and mechanical, then sat down. Hugh's lips moved but whatever he may have said was lost in a peal of thunder. The noise was terrific, like the falling of a great cathedral. Its effect upon McBain surprised me. He jumped up as if some one had attempted to shoot him.

"This damned island!" he cried. "It isn't civilized."

His excitement passed in a moment. He again sat down, drew out his handkerchief, polished his forehead slowly. The incident had loosened his tongue.

"Got back," he began smoothly. "Yes. I've got back and I mustn't forget it. A snug little place, Bastia — rather like Cannes, not like those hills."

"Did they get on your nerves?" Hugh had grown faintly interested.

"On my nerves, as you say. They are not civilized, I'll maintain that anywhere. You as our consul should protest. It's a dastardly shame, what goes on there. A public scandal. A disgrace." He paused.

"Well. You aren't unusual," replied Hugh.

"They've affected people before. They go to the hills and are all right for a day or two. Then they find it lonely, different from Ealing and Clapham. The hills are very high and there are rocks and no ploughed fields. People begin to feel queer. The *maquis* is very silent and on moonless nights the whole world is like a cavern. People begin to take panic, the same feeling that a child experiences if it's shoved for a joke into a cupboard. Well. This panic grips them by the throat and they break their contract with the hotel. Some one ill — any excuse that will let them get back to a city."

McBain cleared his throat.

"Yes," he said, "yes. You describe the sensation admirably. Just what I've gone through. A very comprehensible weakness. One of those 'thousand natural shocks this flesh is heir to' . . . It is a pity Shakespeare has never been set to music. There are good manly parts, opportunities for fetching singing."

Hugh looked at him curiously.

"I believe you're in earnest," he murmured.

"Certainly I'm in earnest. I can laugh with the best of good fellows. But I am not light-minded. Life is serious, to be treated with respect. It is treated shockingly in the hills. That is why I left Vizzavona."

A glare of lightning filled the room. The crash which followed deafened us. McBain winced, frowned but pressed his lips and managed to sit still. The tumult reluctantly subsided.

"Not shockingly," I demurred.

"Sir?"

"I was thinking of your last remark. You said that life was treated shockingly in the hills. I can scarcely believe —"

He interrupted:

"Shockingly. I said it and mean it. Hugh, you will surely bear me out?"

"I'm inclined to agree with Aubrey."

"Then listen!" McBain bent forward, placing his hands on his knees. His expression was powerful and peculiar. He had dignity; there was no denying him that. "I stayed," he went on, "in the hotel you kindly recommended. It was very crowded but I found accommodation by a liberal use of your name. The guests were conservative and there were more men than women. The fact, I consider, is a sure harbinger of trouble."

He paused as if to await the effects of his words. They had been spoken quietly with an authority which I found compelling. Hugh, I saw, was interested too, but he still pretended indifference.

"Go on," he said presently.

"I will. . . . One of the guests, a man, soon attracted attention. He began to be seen with a village girl. At least that is what I supposed her, but now I am not so sure. I think she was something a little superior socially, the daughter of a farmer, that class of girl."

"What a damned idiot!" put in Hugh.

"Maybe. Maybe not. Mind you, I judge no

man. Who can say what really happened? The climate of this island is trying. The sun dazzles you. I believe that it dazzled this man. Or the girl may have tempted him; girls are usually to blame. Temptation would then trip him like a soft but wiry vine."

Hugh yawned.

"I wish you would go on with your story. It is a story, I presume?"

"A very sad one. . . . It was suddenly rumoured that the man had seduced the girl. What beastly spies some people are! Hiding and peering in those forests, those sombre forests . . ." He broke off and for a moment closed his eyes. "Just cads," he resumed. "They spread the rumour I have told you. Then the girl disappeared from the village. Her relatives had . . . had got the wind up, so to speak. It was they who had removed her. And the next thing! The next thing was a shot," he said rapidly. "A shot from the dark, one evening while we sat at dinner." There was a distant peal of thunder. "Like that!" he jumped up.

"Oh, rubbish!" said Hugh. "That thunder's as loud as a cannon."

"Well . . ." McBain seemed undecided.

"Was the blighter hit?" continued Hugh.

"The shot missed."

"I'm rather sorry to hear it."

"Are you? Are you, boy?" McBain sighed. "No one can stand that sort of thing. I couldn't stand it. What was your phrase? 'On the

nerves.' It's perfectly true. I was dumb for the rest of the evening, only yesterday evening. This morning I decided on impulse. I packed my trunk and came down here."

"Will you stay for a time?"

"No, thank you. This is Monday. There is a boat tonight for the continent. I learnt that from an old time-table."

"Yes. You're quite right. She's in."

"Well. I'll board her quickly — now, if you don't mind. I — I hate this storm that's rolling about us today. I shall be glad to see the last of your island. Very pretty, very quiet. Oh, very pretty, I admit! But not — not restful, and I'm recommended rest, you must remember. There's something ominous in the air. Almost terrifying. I wonder you don't feel it. And the customs are too primitive."

Hugh rose.

"Yes, you've had a scare," he said wearily. "Well. I warned you when you first came. Corsica is not Croydon." He smiled slowly. "I wish that fellow had been shot. He deserved it. And I'd like you to have seen it. I feel sure you've never looked upon a dead man."

"I? Certainly not! And don't want to, let me tell you. Don't want to, let me tell you again. . . . There's more thunder. Good-bye, Hugh. But see me off this evening, if you choose."

"Oh, I'll see you off!"

"Excellent." McBain hurried to me. "Good-

bye, sir, good-bye. But I — I think I shall see you at the hotel."

He was through the door before I had time to shake hands.

"Hi!" called Hugh. "What was that fellow's name?"

McBain did not reply. He was out of ear-shot, had already crossed the hall.

The thunder again pealed as though it had been awaiting his exit.

3

"I believe the storm may break after all," said Hugh.

I did not answer.

"Isn't it rather queer?" he went on. "My uncle's profession is to portray this kind of life. There is hardly a comic opera or a musical play that isn't the same. The setting? Tropical or sub-tropical. The scenes? Speaking generally, there is first an embassy, then a grotto in the hills, finally a café or a repetition of the second act. Counts, princesses and brigands, of such is the kingdom of opera. Yet my uncle funks his first experience of the life which provides his livelihood. Don't you find that queer?"

"Children may play at rogues and vagabonds but scream at the sight of a tinker."

"Hm! I suppose you're right."

Costa entered by a window. He had obviously been shopping for he carried a basket laden with

odd packages. He smiled when he saw me, bowed like a courtier, then said something rapid in the *patois*. Hugh understood but answered in French:

“Trouble? Of what sort?”

“The sailors.”

“All the sailors.” Costa, with the rest of his countrymen, depended upon his hands for expression. His need was now urgent. He looked about then dropped his basket on a cushion. “The sailors,” he repeated with a frantic gesture. “It is the sailors who make the trouble. It’s not fair. They may have their grievances, do you see? Oh! But I have my grievances too. And I complain of them never, just suffer and hold my tongue. But these sailors! They are pirates, heretics, free-thinkers.”

“What has happened?” I put in.

“Pardon? . . . General strike of all the sailors of the world.”

“Nonsense!” Hugh was contemptuous.

“Heh, well, Monsieur. Then of those in the port of Bastia.”

Hugh glanced at me.

“That’s interesting.” He returned to Costa.

“Thou art sure?”

“M’sieur Gueyrard himself told me.”

“The strike is declared?”

“Oh, no, m’sieur! Not yet.”

Hugh sneered.

“Listen, Costa! Thou art an old woman. Why trouble me with the lies thou hearest in the market? There is no strike and there will be

none. This town, always is it full of rumours."

"Very well, m'sieur. But wait. You will see." Costa picked up his basket. "Me, I am not a liar, no!" He crossed his lips with his thumb. "I shall no longer chat with m'sieur. I go to prepare the dinner."

He left the room by the door. There was a wink of lightning, a distant rumble in the hills. Hugh presently yawned.

"I think the storm may break," he repeated. "Better stay till it's past. Keep me company at dinner."

I shook my head.

"No, thanks, Hugh. I want to get back. There's some writing."

"I — I wish you would stay."

"I can't. That is, unless you have some special reason?"

He reflected seriously.

"Not the slightest."

"Sure?"

"Absolutely. This thunder has made me uneasy — nothing else. I suppose I should sympathize with my uncle."

There followed a pause. The air was indeed heavy, and Teddy, barking in the garden, increased my sense of oppression. The barks were persistent, links of a chain of growls, threatening, indignant, throaty.

Hugh repeated:

"Yes. I suppose I should sympathize. . . . What a noise that animal is making!"

"One might fancy he'd discovered a murderer. It's probably a lizard."

"Or more probably the thunder. Dogs are very like men."

I moved in the direction of the door.

"Are you going?"

"I must, I'm afraid."

"I'll see you as far as the gate."

"Do."

We left the room and I found my hat. Hugh opened the door.

"Out you go."

I obeyed. Hugh thoughtfully followed me down the steps to the garden. We strolled side by side beneath the canopy of his vine.

"Life's a mistake," he presently said.

"Why?"

"It's too distracting. Nothing but disappointments. I'm tired, tired, tired. I hate life and yet I cling to it. I expect because I don't know if there's anything better in store for me."

"You should take life less seriously. You give yourself no rest."

"Rest!" He looked at me. "I'm too much alive," he concluded.

"Learn to be more indifferent."

He shook his head. We reached the gate and he slowly opened it.

"I can't, Aubrey. Tell fire to learn to be cold. Or time to stand still. I am what I am. Only circumstances might change me."

"We make our own circumstances."

"Not always, not always. You're too ready to generalize. I suppose it's the result of a comfortable current account."

"Good-bye, Hugh."

"Good-bye."

I was on the point of leaving when I noticed two figures. Madame Abbaticci and Mabel Cain were approaching over the waste ground which had once been selected for a hospital.

Hugh saw them too. He straightened his shoulders and hope came into his eyes.

Mabel Cain presently raised her hand. The gaiety of the action seemed forced, the action itself spasmodic. She drew nearer and smiled. It struck me then that her smile was tremulous. Hugh held out his hands. She ignored the left, but clasped the other between her palms.

"How awfully good of you!" said Hugh. "And in spite of the storm hanging round! Everything right?"

"Yes, thank you."

I studied her closely and tried to understand. She had become subdued of late. Everything she did was tentative. Everything she said was marked by a certain reticence. Her manners were better, her emotions more easily reached.

The recovery of her sight had produced these

changes. Were they permanent? I did not think so. It seemed to me that sight had given her an impetus, started her down a hill at a growing pace which she could not check. Who could say what these changes betokened? Were they vital changes or mere by-products of a revolution to her whole nature? I could only surmise. My mind was disturbed. She would yet bring disaster. This was my conviction though I had no evidence in support of it.

An unreasonable irritation overcame me. I said:

"Oh, I hate this — this foreboding weather!"

Hugh laughed. He had recovered his spirits.

"It's splendid! It sends thrills down your back. Like big game shooting. Or like hearing a good ghost-story."

"You complained of it yourself," I reminded him.

"Oh, that! That was a joke." He turned his back on me. "Come," he said in French to his visitors. "Let us go into the house."

"M'sieur," began Madame Abbaticci, "we regret —"

"No, Hugh, we can't come in," Mabel Cain interrupted.

"Why not?"

"We're going to drive as far as Barbaggio."

"Into the hills? You can't do that today."

She nodded emphatically.

"But it isn't safe!"

"The carriage is standing down there."

I had been waiting my opportunity to go but I now decided to remain. Mabel Cain did not require my escort and I had no wish for her company.

Hugh drew a slow breath. He seemed bewildered.

"Say I'm a pig!" cried Mabel Cain impulsively. "I can see you're lonely today. I know you want me to come in."

"I certainly want you."

"Yes. But . . . but . . ."

"But what?"

"Oh, I don't know how to explain it! This storm that's coming on. I feel sure it's coming. I want to see it. Please let me see it! I won't be struck by lightning . . . Promise . . . And if I were struck, I don't care. It would be worth it. And anyhow it doesn't much matter."

"She is like that all the afternoon," put in Madame Abbatucci calmly.

Mabel Cain turned.

"You do not understand, you," she said quickly.

"Me, I suffer. Suffer, do you see?"

"Yes," Hugh began.

She faced him desperately.

"You don't understand either. It isn't a whim, this excursion. It's a craving, a terrible craving. I could close my eyes and — and swoon with the joy this awful spectacle will give me. Blue-black clouds. A flaming rim. Mad serpents of gold darting across it." Her voice grew high and she

went on rapidly: "It isn't any use objecting, Hugh, because I'm really going to give myself this pleasure. I'm going now. I can't explain and you don't understand but I know what I mean myself so what's the use of objecting?"

Hugh's answer surprised me.

"You're a sport," he declared enthusiastically.

She closed her eyes. Their lids quivered.

"I was afraid you'd be angry," she said, looking up.

"I'd never be that. Not with you."

Well. They were both remarkable, I decided, beyond the comprehension of a man as ordinary as I. To me her outburst seemed ridiculous. I could suppose merely that there were rarities of feeling unknown to my experience and therefore unintelligible. Intellect can deal only with that which it knows.

"I'm just a butterfly finding the sun," she went on.

Her tone was coaxing and fastidious. She had spoken at random, did not realize what she had said. I yet caught my breath, for her metaphor endowed the whole situation with meaning. I divined then the romance that life had become for her. Spiritual things appeared dead and hateful, the joy of life was supreme. A battle with the elements, blood, wine and kisses — life seemed stagnation without them.

Hugh replied:

"There is no more to be said. You shall go."

"Thank you, Hugh." Her tone was again subdued.

"Only I beg you to be careful."

"Yes, I'll be careful. . . . Hugh!"

"Well?"

"I wish you would smoke again." Her voice had suddenly grown remorseful. I could still comprehend her mood, I could still follow its process.

Hugh shook his head.

"No. I shan't do that."

"Why?"

"A promise is a promise."

"But I release you?"

"It's very good of you, but no, thanks. I don't want to. . . . A promise is a promise."

"Oh, I think you're cruel, too mean for words!" Her passion was gone in a flash. "No, no! I'm sorry. It's I who am mean. You must always do what will make you happy. Always."

He placed his hand on her arm.

"If you're driving to the hills you should start now."

"Of course. I'd never have worried you, only Madame said I must tell you."

They left. Hugh blankly watched them as they crossed the waste ground. I stood beside him, waiting till they were out of sight. Their company attracted me less than ever for I had too much to remember, too much to decide.

Hugh fell into a reverie and presently reflected aloud:

"A mirror. That would be the best word."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Mm? . . . I was thinking of what we were saying. Life to me is so different to what it is to you."

"Life is different to every one."

"Exactly. That's why I'm puzzled. I've been trying to find out the reason. I think I've succeeded. Life is a mirror: we see ourselves in it and believe it's what we are ourselves."

"Then it isn't a mistake, as you said."

"No. But it's a pity."

His lips tightened, his chin grew obstinate. I did not know if I should take him seriously. You could never be sure of Hugh. He was perverse, proud and fond of perplexing the listener.

He suddenly looked at me.

"Shall I see you tonight?" His expression was anxious.

"Not even then. The fact is, I've been slack-ing."

"Shall I see you tomorrow?"

"Of course. If you wish."

Teddy's bark again disturbed us. It came from the same direction as before. I reflected idly that it could not be provoked by a lizard; lizards are restless creatures.

"Oh, I'm worn out!" exclaimed Hugh.

"Go to bed."

He considered my suggestion as though it concerned salvation.

"N-no. I don't think I shall," he said at last.

"Well. Take things easy at any rate. Dine handsomely and read a novel till ten."

He again considered.

"Thank you. Yes. I'll do so. That's sound advice. . . . Look here, Aubrey, you take things easy for a change. I know you're busy. Never mind. Stay and have dinner. Come on! You must. I hate being thwarted. No one ever thwarts me."

I laughed.

"Then some one's going to thwart you now."

"You won't slack?"

"I've been slacking too much already."

He became silent and crestfallen. There was a distant peal of thunder, the last I was to hear that day.

Costa came running down the path. He began before he reached us:

"There you are! Yes. There you are! Me, I have sought you everywhere. The soup may boil over. The vegetables may singe. That does not matter to me."

"It is true," agreed Hugh gloomily. "That may not matter to thee. But to me it is a tragedy. Tell me then, what is that which has brought thee from thy task?"

Costa paused, panted and rubbed his forehead with his sleeve. He replied earnestly:

"M'sieur, I come from speaking on the telephone. The conversation ended like that." He

sliced the air with his hand. "But very clearly I am not a liar."

"With whom wert thou talking?"

"With M'sieur the Italian Consul."

"I will not see him."

"No, m'sieur. I well know that m'sieur cares little for business. I told him you were out. It is true, is it not?"

"Perfectly."

"Yes, it is true. . . . But, m'sieur, the strike is now declared. He told me so."

"Indeed?"

"The strike of the sailors. Yes, m'sieur."

"What do they want?"

"That which all the world wants. More money. They are not reasonable. Me, I very much want—"

"Enough. That is understood." Hugh reflected. "The boat for Nice, it will not leave to-night?"

"Never. Not till the strike is over." Costa's excitement passed suddenly. "The dinner," he concluded. "I must get back to it."

He hurried away. Hugh frowned, then blankly regarded the sea. He thoughtfully remarked:

"That finishes my uncle, I'm afraid. He'll have to stay here till this wretched business is settled."

I raised my shoulders.

"Well. It's excitement."

"Yes. But I'd rather . . ."

"Rather what?"

"Oh, I don't know! I tell you this thunder has upset me."

I glanced at the hills. The clouds had vanished and their crest was golden in the light of the setting sun.

"It's not going to break," I decided.

"That's something to be thankful for," said Hugh.

4

I agreed with him, as I went back to the Cynos-Palace Hotel. My sense of oppression had vanished; I now felt as ashamed as though it were a superstitious practice. A few birds twittered in the trees and their song further reassured me.

I reached the hotel, paused on the threshold and looked back. The sea was still calm though a welcome breeze rippled the surface. Not a ship was to be seen. The eastern horizon was already fading into darkness. The packet-boat for Nice, due to sail that night, lay deserted by the quay. A few intending passengers hovered by her moorings, like dazed wasps driven from their hive. Some sailors had gathered by a shed and one was making a speech. Six gendarmes ostentatiously patrolled the quay, and a group of loafers discussed the situation with the help of cigarettes.

The boat would not sail; that was certain. There was nothing interesting to see so I entered the hotel. I was already on the stairs when a sound caused me to turn. McBain had darted from the lounge and seemed anxious to speak to

me. He was somewhat breathless but not undignified.

"Well?" I made as though to descend.

"A moment, if I may."

I descended, wondering what he wanted. He must have been awaiting my arrival. I felt annoyed for I liked him less than ever. My heart hardened and I made a vow that I would not have him at my table.

"Well?" I repeated on reaching the hall.

"In the lounge, if you don't mind."

He stood my scrutiny without flinching. His eyes were blank, his lips determined. His face seemed a mask. Yes, I decided, he was a fine figure of a man. He might be florid, he might be *passé*, but he was still arresting. You were bound to admire his physique. He had character, will, self-confidence, passion — power.

I followed him to the lounge and we sat at opposite sides of a large leather-topped table. He began:

"I want you —" A thought struck him. "But have a drink?"

"No, thanks."

"A cocktail?"

"No, thanks."

"Gin and bitters? Or a vermouth?"

"Nothing at all, thank you."

"I'll have a whisky and soda."

He rose deliberately, crossed the room agilely, pressed the bell and returned. His French was

pitiful but the waiter managed to understand him.

"There's nothing like whisky," said McBain. "To me it's what milk is to babes." He added: "Well. It braces you." There was a pause. "I'm sorry to keep you but I feel the need of a stimulant."

The waiter came back. McBain paid him, filled the glass and half emptied it with relish. He paused, put down the glass, then laughed. I want to describe that laugh. It was quiet, cynical, apparently reasonless, unnerving. I started and shivered.

He said:

"That's the stuff." His expression suddenly grew purposeful. "Well. But to come back to business."

"Yes. I shall be interested to hear . . ."

"You shall. I want you to do me a favour."

I nodded but did not commit myself.

"My French," he went on, "is weak. I know that. Now, I'm tired of Corsica and of Corsicans. There are no theatres, no life. The women are schoolgirls. I have been lonely, sir. Hugh does not want me. He packed me off to the hills the morning after my arrival, and since then I have not set eyes on him till today. He is wrapped up in his fiancée, whom I have not been allowed to meet. He does not like me, he will not trust me. Oh, I am no fool!"

I was not obliged to spare his feelings so I merely nodded. He licked his lips, then compressed them.

"And that's that," he continued. "Well, Mr. Broom, there is a lack of privacy in Corsica which I find disgusting. You are a man of the world. You will therefore realize that I am something better than a chorus-man." He smiled at the notion. "I am accustomed to my own dressing-room and the best dressing-room at that. In short, sir, I am a star." He rapped out this sentence as though it were an order.

I said coldly :

"Please keep to the point. My time is limited. I don't want to hurry you but . . ."

"I understand, and I am keeping to the point. You were present when I saw Hugh. You know that I am leaving this island tonight. I have no cabin reserved. My French is weak so I cannot explain what I want. I want a cabin to myself. I don't mind how small, I don't mind the position. But there must be no one else. I must be able to lock my door. Will you see the captain or the agents and arrange this? I am well aware that I have no claim upon your attention. Take this request as from one Englishman to another."

I had heard him with increasing bewilderment. He was so certain of his wants, so confident they could be satisfied. I spoke to him in the end as to a self-willed child.

"But you can't do all that, you know."

He dropped his hand on the table.

"Then I shall not trust myself on the boat."

"The boat! Why, it won't even sail!"

“Not sail!” His tone was at first displeased, then his colour changed and he looked concerned. “What — what do you mean, sir? I’m not accustomed . . .”

“I’m talking sense. Surely you know that this kind of trouble doesn’t pass in an hour!”

“Trouble? Now — now just tell me. Tell me calmly. What trouble do you mean?”

“I mean the strike.” He was so perplexed that I continued: “Don’t you know the sailors have struck?”

“Good God, no!” His dismay was painful. He rapidly moistened his lips. “Why have they struck? When did they do it? What will happen? It’s a scandal. The soldiers should fire on them.”

“They did it this afternoon. But you must have seen!”

“I saw there was a crowd. Speeches. That kind of thing. But I never thought of it. It’s what one expects from the natives.”

“Did no one tell you?”

“Tell me? How could they tell me? They can’t talk plain English.” He swallowed. “Yes, I suppose some one told me but I didn’t understand. I was at the agent’s about a cabin. He shook his head and — and jabbered. I thought he was merely wanting a bribe.”

I repeated:

“They struck this afternoon.”

“But this is cruel, a blow beneath the belt!”

He snatched his tumbler and emptied it. His colour slowly returned. "I'll hire a boat and sail to France!" he declared.

"Italy is nearer and that's about seventy miles."

"I don't care. Not I!"

"Perhaps not. But the owner of the boat will. . . . Mr. McBain, you can't hire a boat. No one will let it. The fishermen sympathize with the sailors."

There was a pause. He appeared to be thinking rapidly.

"I won't be beaten!" he suddenly exclaimed.

He rose and began to pace the lounge. He hesitated, returned, and sat down. A great change had come over him. His cheeks were grey, his eyes feverish. I could not help pitying him and said on an impulse:

"Look here, have some more whisky!"

He shook his head.

"No. No, thank you. I never drink when I'm in this state. That way lies ruin." He gulped. "You think me weak but I am not so. I may have had . . . I have my misfortunes. They result from chance, not thoughtlessness. I won't drink! I won't!"

"Just as you please." I looked away and presently lit a cigarette. His silence began to irritate me so I said between the puffs: "This — isn't a tragedy, you know. You can — be quite comfortable here. Till the strike's over."

"Perhaps, perhaps." His tone was absent.

"I'll explain to the proprietor, if you like."

"Yes. No." He roused himself. "Mr. Broom, leave that for the moment. I want to make a confession."

His manner puzzled me. It had suddenly become jaunty. Had the whisky gone to his head? I studied him afresh. His rôle appeared that of the hero in a light comedy. His expression was engaging, frankly designed to captivate his audience and breed toleration of past foibles. I dare say it would have proved effective on the stage but I found it repellent.

I repressed a shiver and said:

"What do you want to tell me? Think carefully before you give me your confidence."

"Lord Lepperton, my close friend, has often told me things."

"I'm not Lord Lepperton."

He smiled.

"Between men —"

"Please!" I held up my hand.

"I don't know your attitude to these things . . ."

He had exasperated me.

"What things?" I shouted.

"Well. I've been naughty."

Naughty! The affected word and his light manner maddened me. It was only with an effort that I kept my seat. Had I risen then I should have struck him.

It must have dawned on him that he had failed to reach my sympathies. He leant back, pressed

the tips of his fingers and contemplated me.

"You are young," he said in a level voice. "Youth is the period of cruel opinions and of great responsibilities undertaken rashly. I have lived through that period."

My face must have shown my scepticism for he went on:

"Yes. Believe me, I have lived through that period. I have outgrown it, though. Every one outgrows it. At first one is tempted to classify morals. We want good or bad. We won't have half measures. The good must never sin, the bad must never aspire or we call them both hypocrites. Young man, time has taught me that there are no saints, no sinners. Or, if you prefer it, that every one is a saintly sinner. Or to extend my meaning, that every one is a sinning saint. For man is born of the mating of the gods with the brutes. I say you will learn that some day and be sorry that you were found wanting, when a man, a real man, honoured you with his private affairs."

This speech did not leave me unmoved. Its philosophy might or might not be sound but there was no doubting the conviction of the man who delivered it. I began to fear him. His power was almost hypnotic. I cleared my throat and replied:

"I'm sorry if I have seemed presumptuous. But I can't say more. If I have forgotten the difference in our age it is your fault; I — I must insist on that. I daresay I am hasty . . ."

He checked me.

"You are a young man with a brilliant future and a present which many must envy. But you are young. That is my whole point."

Further argument seemed childish.

"Go on," I said.

His face at once cleared. He separated his hands, leant an arm on the table and began in an even voice, quizzical but reminiscent:

"I want to get away from those hills. Vizzavona is pretty but I prefer to keep it as a memory. Oh, yes! I don't think I want to go back there. Or at any rate, not in these trousers, as the low comedians used to say."

"Weren't you comfortable, sir?"

"Comfortable?" He glanced at me. "Yes. I was comfortable, thank you. Let me tell you. I stayed in the hotel my nephew recommended. It was too full and too empty. I mean, of course, that there were too many men and too few women. A bad thing, Broom, for we are all poor devils at heart. What is humanity? Moths fluttering round a candle. What is the candle? Sex, Broom, sex."

He paused, pressed his lips, leant back and sighed complacently. He went on rather quickly:

"The eternal feminine! I met her by the station while the sun was sinking. What a girl! Eyes like sloes, cheeks like ivory, red lips! The usual result! I didn't know her language, she didn't know mine. But love finds a way. Well. I don't blame myself, I don't blame myself!"

I started.

"Blame yourself? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean the same old story. I watched for her once and managed to meet her. She watched for me three times and managed to meet me too. Then we met by appointment. I did the best that a man of spirit can do, but women are never content unless they get what they're better without. I was snared at last and she got it. Perhaps it was a pity. Who can say?"

"You — you bounder!"

The words sprang from me. I am sorry to be melodramatic but the phrase fits the occasion.

McBain rose to the crisis. He cast his mood as though it were a broken sword. His face grew cruel and impassive. He began authoritatively:

"You fool! You're a novice at the game of life —"

"Cut that out!"

I smile at my interjection now. I was doubtful of it even then. Why had I used it? I was not an American. Where had I learnt it? The disquieting thought struck me that I had once seen it quivering on a dark screen. A cowboy hero (with twelve "bad men" cringing before his revolver) had spoken it. Our tongues are sometimes artificial when our hearts are beating most sincerely.

McBain, however, accepted the phrase as natural. It was the currency of the land in which he lived.

"I won't cut it out," he replied.

"Then I tell you again. You're a bounder."

"Listen, my young Puritan."

"No. You must listen to me. And I accuse you . . . I accuse you . . ." Words failed me. "The man you told us of . . . Who seduced the girl . . . You were telling us of yourself. You are the man."

"Yes. I am the man."

His composure increased my anger. I went on hotly:

"Behaved like a cad. And you dare to lecture me on manners! And I half apologized! Well. I take it back, do you hear? I wish they had shot you last night."

The word *shot* reminded him of the present. His mood again changed. He paled and his voice grew urgent.

"Yes," he said, "yes. Some one fired at me last night. I suppose it was her father or her brother. . . . I don't know. What an abominable country is this! Why do they want to shoot me? I've done no harm. The affair was only an episode. I go back to England. She remains here. No one can prove anything. Then why worry? There will be no — no publicity. I could understand if there was to be publicity. And it wasn't as if she were a lady. Why, I'll give her money . . ." He broke off and appeared to realize afresh. "But it's no use! A bullet defies reason. It doesn't give you time to argue, to explain. Why, it's monstrous! I can hardly believe it. A red flash and

a horrid explosion! Something singing past my ear! I tell you, it's monstrous. I'm not used to it! I'm not used to it! Do you realize it might have killed me? It was meant to kill me. Kill. Not frighten. Do you realize that?"

I did not answer, for a thought had struck me. I grappled with it, thrust it from me, then yielded once more to its horror.

McBain's egotism was colossal. He noticed my expression and at once attributed it to solicitude for his own safety.

"What is it?" he shouted. He pushed back his chair and sprang aside with an agility that I found surprising.

"Hugh."

"Hugh?" Relief overcame him. "What's wrong with Hugh?"

"Nothing, I hope. Everything. . . . Oh, my God! Hugh!" I rose also.

"You've gone mad."

"Yes. I think I shall go mad." I turned on him.

"Quick! 'Found accommodation by a liberal use of your name.' What do you mean by that?"

"I don't understand . . ."

"You used those words. When you were telling us the — the first version, the lie. Quick. Answer me. What did you mean?"

"I — I see your point. Well. I meant very little. Merely that I let every one understand our relationship. I made it evident that Hugh was my nephew."

"Then you've murdered him." He stared. "Murdered him," I repeated. "Don't you know the laws of the vendetta?"

"Vendetta?"

"Yes, the vendetta. And he once warned you against family quarrels! And now! Now by your beastly desires you've made one. This girl in Viz-zavona, her people have missed you. But they know Hugh is your nephew. They'll creep on him by night. Silently. They'll hide in his garden . . ." I stopped. Another thought had struck me.

McBain whispered hopefully:

"The wall is high and he locks the gate."

"Yes. But there's the other gate, the little gate by the gas-works. Costa has never mended it."

He seemed puzzled but I did not stop to explain. My fears had ceased to be nebulous for we convince ourselves by repeating our convictions. Creeds are valuable for this reason.

I darted from the lounge, caught up my hat, ran from the hotel as from a torment. I skirted the Place and sped northwards. Every moment seemed a wasted life-time; I sobbed with suspense and impatience. A mild breeze touched my face as if gently to turn me. There was no moon and the darkness was slowly thickening.

I left the town and quickened my pace. The grey path loomed before me ever at the same distance. I began to believe that I was not advancing and a sense of impotence overcame me. The thud-

ding of my feet was the only sound, but the night seemed alive and watchful.

I reached the Consulate and pulled the bell. There were a great clanging within and a protest of frightened barks. The clanging ceased but the barking grew to a frenzy. No one came and I rang again. The bell and the barking shook my nerve. I rang for the third time then lost courage. I shouted defiance and beat upon the gate.

It yielded and I nearly screamed. I passed, however, to the garden. The darkness was so impenetrable that I swerved unintentionally and blundered against the vine. I put up my arms but a few twigs evaded them and scratched my face. The accident steadied me. I proceeded more warily and at last stood before the villa.

My ardour suddenly cooled. I began to tremble, not with fear, but with foreboding. The persistent barking within merely emphasized the silence, the peace of the garden was sinister. Shafts of light escaped the living-room windows. They were vaguely significant, I thought, like messages which I could not read.

I set my teeth, climbed the steps and went in. The room was empty, the furniture not disarranged. The table was laid for dinner but the cloth was crooked and the napkin had been removed. I noticed a second later that a bowl of water rested on the floor and that Hugh's handkerchief lay beside it. I fell on my knees beside these objects for their presence corroborated my fears.

The water was pink, the handkerchief dark with blood. I dropped it hastily and scrambled to my feet.

The door burst open and Teddy bounded to me, sobbing with his need of comfort. I pushed him aside and hurried from the room. The hall was quiet but I heard with relief that some one was moving above. I went upstairs and would have entered Hugh's room, but Costa came out as I reached for the handle.

"My master . . . my dear master . . ." he quavered. "From the garden . . . a gunshot . . ." His knees gave and his voice failed but there was no need to go on.

I could see beyond him into the lamp-lit room. The bed bore a long figure. The eyes were bandaged, the arms crumpled. The peace of the lips was enigmatic.

The doctor had come and gone.

I sat by the bedside and saw day blossom like a rose. The shadows of the room grew phantasmal, the lamp-light pale and unwholesome. The shutters uncertainly moved as a sea-breeze cleared the atmosphere. The promise of the dawn was at length fulfilled and the room sparkled with sunshine.

I put out the lamp. Costa entered as I quietly returned to my seat. His eyes were red-rimmed and anxious. The droop of his shoulders was pitiful. His lean hands clutched a tray and the cup

thereupon rattled. He was scared, scandalized, unwilling and reminded me of a child forced to witness an obscenity.

Teddy crept from beneath the bed, shook himself then grew despondent as he saw our hopeless expressions. His eyes were pained as they studied us. He presently trotted to the bed, whimpered and placed his paws on the counterpane. It rose and fell as the figure beneath stirred.

I said to Costa:

"He will live."

"Yes, m'sieur, he will live. The doctor told me that too." The old man put down the tray. "Coffee simple," he murmured. "Me, I always make good coffee."

"Thanks, Costa, thanks."

"But perhaps m'sieur desires some bread?"

"I am not very hungry this morning."

"No, m'sieur. Neither am I. . . . M'sieur!" He hesitated at the door.

"Well?"

"M'sieur the Consul will live. He is not in danger. I know that. But his eyes, his eyes . . ."

I set my teeth.

"His eyes . . ." Costa covered his face.

I said brutally:

"No. He will never again see. It is better to face facts. The doctor told me most plainly. The course of the bullet was such that— Oh, but ask the doctor! Me, I can stand no more."

"But for him it is worse than death!"

“Don’t I know it?” I cried. I started forward but subsided quickly for the counterpane was again stirring.

The shrivelled hand that I knew so well was uplifted. It feebly plucked at the grey bandage and I found its eloquence cruel.

PART IV
ELLEN GAY

CHAPTER I

THE END BEGINS

1

SITUATIONS must be met. The greatest grief is seldom respected by the world. Events, like timid clerks, keep dropping in for instructions. . . .

I sent Costa to McBain with a statement of what had happened. McBain was Hugh's relative so perforce had to be told. Responsibility, indeed, rested on his shoulders but I did not expect him to accept it. I would not have allowed him to do so for he had proved himself incapable of protecting Hugh's interests.

I next wrote to Miss Gay. Her claim upon Hugh was not one which the world would understand but I was for that reason more anxious to acknowledge it. Claims are often forgotten by the very people in whose favour they are made. These people can in any case guard themselves; they have birth certificates or lawyer's parchments with which to enforce their rights. Others, however, sacrifice much, ask little and gain nothing.

The doctor and the sub-prefect then demanded my attention. The former confirmed his diagnosis.

Hugh's wound had been received at an angle. The brain had escaped serious injury but the optic nerve was so damaged that sight in future seemed improbable. The sub-prefect was concerned, not with the deed, but with the doer. He put me through a lengthy inquisition. It seemed to lead nowhere and I gathered the impression that Hugh's assailant would never be discovered. They both left me despondent and with a deepening sense of revolt.

My hardest task yet remained. Mabel Cain might have been expected to hear rumours but she was none the less silent. It was my duty to send for her at once but I shrank from the task for reasons I could not define. I sighed in the end, sat down with a heavy heart, attempted to write sympathetically. I assumed, though reason misgave me, that the news would shock her as it had shocked me and therefore told it plainly. My misgivings, however, led me away. I realized my presumption only when I found myself saying that "she must of course come at once." Hugh was her lover and I had no reason to suppose she had forgotten the fact. I quickly rewrote the letter. Mabel Cain was with me in an hour.

I left her with Hugh and took my worries to the garden. It was long before she joined me. We stood in silence for a full minute while I racked my brains for the right word. I finally stole a glance at her. Her eyes were wide and full of trouble. She seemed abstracted and stared excit-

edly at nothing. Her cheeks were white, her lips tremulous. She was weak, panic-stricken, woe-begone.

I decided to be practical.

"About a room," I said.

"Yes, thank you." She started. "I'm sorry. I didn't hear. What were you saying?"

"You'd better have a room downstairs. Madame Abbattucci can share it with you."

"I suppose that would be better."

"Costa will take turns in watching Hugh."

She gulped and nodded.

"He will need careful nursing."

"I'm sure of that." She looked at me. "Mr. Broom!"

"Well?"

"His . . . his whole appearance."

"I don't understand."

"Oh, it's awful!" She covered her face with her hands. The gesture was unexpected. "Shut it out," she said in a stifled voice. Her hands dropped.

I was greatly disturbed.

"Of course it's a tragedy. . . ."

"Oh, I don't mean that! Yes, I suppose it's a tragedy. But I am thinking . . . just thinking. . . ."

"What?"

"His looks!" She shivered. "Oh, he's dreadful! There's something dreadful in the sight of him. I . . . I can't bear to look at him. Really,

I can't! That awful hand! And his face . . . like a blank wall . . . with those bandages! She locked her fingers. "And there's going to be a scar. Costa told me."

"Scars are the insignia God gives brave men."

"Do you think I don't know? I've said so to myself. . . . Mr. Broom, it's no use. I once knew a girl who couldn't bear the sight of a spider. She lost her head if a spider came near her. She became . . . utterly unreasonable. I laughed at her for I didn't understand then. I understand now. She wasn't to blame. Her feeling was beyond control. When I look at Hugh. . . ." She hesitated. "I feel as she must have felt when she looked at a hideous spider."

"Well, even so," I began.

"Even so! You're going to reason. But I tell you they're beyond reason, feelings of the kind I mean. Oh, can't you understand? The girl could avoid spiders, run away from them, kill them. I am expected to touch Hugh, spend my life at his mercy!"

She was right. Her feeling defied analysis. It was better to change the subject so I said:

"Well. I'll tell Costa to prepare your room."

There was a pause. I thought she had failed to hear but she suddenly declared:

"No. I can't." Her tone was clamant, positive as though she had exhausted her resources.

The words bewildered me.

"Do you mean . . . ?"

"I . . . just can't! I can't nurse Hugh! I couldn't bear. . . ." She again covered her eyes. "Mr. Broom," she went on, lowering her hands, "I'm desperate. Sometimes you reach a point when you don't care what people think, what people say. You simply know that there's a certain thing you can't face. Anything's better than facing it . . . disgrace, suffering, even death. I've reached that point. I can't see much of Hugh at present. I must have time to get used to him. Think what you like."

I coldly replied:

"Very well. It isn't really my affair. You need not be afraid. I fully understand. You are mistress of your own actions, so I shan't criticize. Of course I expected . . . but let that pass. I shall wire for Miss Gay."

"Oh, do!" Her relief was genuine. "I'm sure she is a good nurse, much better than I. She can live here and Madame Abbattucci will keep her company."

"I imagine she will see you occasionally?"

"I'll come every day. To ask for him. And I'll see him . . . now and then." She added piteously: "I must have time to get used to him!"

"As you wish."

"I shall go now."

I followed her to the gate, closed and locked it behind her. My brain was active as I came back.

Impulse had moved me to decide I should send for Miss Gay. I now resolved to abide by that decision.

My first move, therefore, was to dispatch a telegram to Vivari:

"Can you nurse Hugh. Several weeks job."

The answer was surprising. Miss Gay appeared within thirty minutes! I hid my incredulity and hastened to receive her. We met in the long living-room and her composure impressed me as natural. I soon, however, saw that it had been won, for her eyes were red as if from much weeping. She spoke steadily and seemed capable. I was glad that I had chosen her. There was no doubt that she would make an efficient nurse.

We shook hands in silence. Her touch thrilled me and I noted the fact curiously. She was not young, not pretty. She was the same woman whom I had heard called a spinster. I had never demurred at the title and I could not do so now. Attraction, I reflected, depends on the pace of disillusionment. It is rooted in mystery.

She said:

"I came as soon as I had got over the letter you sent me. Mother can do without me for a while. I really don't know if I'm any use. If I'm not, please tell me and I'll go away."

"It's just about half-an-hour since I sent you a wire to come."

"Did you?" She spoke eagerly and her eyes brightened.

"I want you to make a sacrifice."

"I'll make any sacrifice."

"I want you to nurse Hugh."

Her expression softened. She presently turned away, hesitated, then went to a window. She bent her head. I saw her touch her cheeks with her handkerchief.

"Miss Gay!" I approached with assumed carelessness.

She did not answer so I came nearer and repeated:

"Miss Gay! For Hugh's sake!"

She straightened her shoulders and turned.

"I'm going to keep up, I won't cry." She smiled. "I shall do whatever you tell me, whatever is best for Hugh."

"Then you accept? You'll nurse him?"

She looked at me as peculiarly as though she were reading my thoughts. Her eyes in the end grew tender and wise. She replied gently:

"No, dear. I can't do that. It's . . . her place, don't you see, and you're asking me to take it."

"I know it's her place. She's refused it."

"Refused it? Refused to nurse Hugh?"

I nodded.

"But when?"

"Oh, today! Some time ago."

Her expression grew puzzled and a trifle pained. She bit her lip and wrinkled her forehead.

"I can't understand, I'm afraid."

"Neither can I." The spirit of prophecy filled me. "Neither can she, I believe. Not yet."

"Not yet." Miss Gay's tone was concerned. She shivered suddenly and came back to the present. "He fell here, I suppose. In this room?"

"Over there."

She looked at the spot then said:

"I'd better see him, hadn't I?"

"Are you willing to nurse him?"

"I love him so truly that I care only to be near him. That is the truth so there can be no harm in admitting it."

"You will sleep in this house. Madame Abbattucci will keep you company."

"I had thought of my old rooms. I'll have to go home for one night. After that I shall do what you say."

"Miss Gay!"

"Yes?"

"There can be no harm in admitting the truth. I use your own words. Let us face facts, then. Hugh has changed."

She replied slowly:

"I know that."

"He is . . . not pretty to look at. His head is bandaged and I am told that the scar will be horrible. And somehow his hand is more noticeable. Oh, I think misfortunes are mirrors! They seem to reflect one another."

"Why are you telling me all this?"

"Because it is better to know the worst. I don't

want you to be disgusted. Revolted by Hugh's appearance."

She smiled.

"How little you understand women!"

"Perhaps."

"Why I . . . I love Hugh's hand, his dear hand! He's too good for me. Any defect. . . . It would only bring him closer, make him more like myself."

Yes. Hugh was safe in her charge. Nothing remained to be said. I brought her to his room and there left her. I then sought the garden and awaited her coming as I had awaited Mabel Cain's.

She was with me in ten minutes. There was no trace of disgust in her expression. Rather did she seem elated. Her joy, however, was unselfish. Self-negation, satisfactorily attained, alone could have made her what she was.

I advanced to meet her.

"Well?"

"I've seen him."

"You didn't stay long."

"There wasn't any use. I don't believe in staring. If a thing's a pity, it's a pity; father always said that. Staring does not help. It only makes you morbid."

"By Jove, you're magnificent!"

She did not hear for she had grown reflective. Her eyes followed a scarlet butterfly twinkling from flower to flower. She presently spoke her thoughts:

"He said that my hand was as light as a butterfly resting on a leaf. Poor boy! He wanted to know if I remembered the Consuls' Ball. And then he asked me to kiss him."

"Hugh said that?" I am afraid my astonishment was crude.

She looked at me and smiled.

"He thought I was Mabel Cain."

"But your voice?"

"I never spoke, I let him think he was right."

"Well!" I sighed. "He'll soon find out who you are. I don't see the point. . . ."

"Don't you? I do. He cares for her as I care for him. Oh, I know it! I'm sure of it! If he lost her he would just collapse and die."

I nodded.

"Yes. You're right. That's what I've always believed. That's what I've . . . feared. Feared? I don't know. . . ."

"Very well, then. If he cares for her as I care for him he won't mind how much he may suffer so long as he thinks she's beside him. Let him think she's beside him."

"It's hardly fair to you."

"Please remember that I don't count. I'm Hugh's nurse. Nothing more."

"Yes. But . . ."

"If I thought there was any question of usurping Miss Cain's rights I'd leave tomorrow."

"As you wish."

She had changed beyond recognition. She knew

her own mind and was not afraid to act on its dictates. Her principles were set. Nothing, I perceived, could persuade her to abandon them.

She had once told me "she could sleep for a hundred years." I now said to test her:

"Life is unfair. One gets very tired. The battle becomes too much for us. Don't you think so?"

"Life's just what we make it. We can make it pleasant, often at the expense of others. Or we can make it pleasant for others, often at our own expense."

"But the feeling that we can't go on?"

"It's not exhaustion but. . . . Wait a minute. There's a funny American word. 'Cussedness'—that expresses what I mean."

"You believe it can be fought down?"

"I know it. We must make our interests, not where our hearts would have us, but where our bodies are."

I held out my hand. She seemed perplexed but said: "Good-bye."

"Good-bye. But I didn't shake hands for that purpose. I wanted to thank you. You've given me in a sentence the secret of complete contentment."

"Have I?" She smiled. "Well. I'd never have found it but for you."

"Thank you again. Thank you." I pressed her hand and then turned away.

"Mr. Broom!"

I stopped. She said delicately:

"I shall never love any one but Hugh."

There was no mistaking her meaning. Her penetration was remarkable. I found myself envying Hugh. He had for nothing what I should have given much to win. I would not, however, show my feelings. Nothing remained to be said so I left her and walked southwards, past the station, along the Rue de l'Opéra till I reached the Palais de Justice.

A path, like the dry bed of a torrent, wound from behind it into the heart of the mountains. It was narrow, crumbling and steep. A natural wall of rugged stone rose on one side. The path was lonely and I often took it. I did so now, rounded a corner and encountered Mabel Cain!

We nearly collided. Both of us showed surprise and perhaps a trace of resentment. We are not naturally communistic. A pleasure depreciates when all acknowledge its value.

"I didn't expect . . ." I began.

"No."

I raised my hat and would have allowed her to pass. She did not move.

"You come here often?" I continued.

"Not very often."

She was pale. Her face was thin, her eyes were deep and attractive. I had perhaps been misjudging her. Some women so suffer that they lose the power of expression. The magnitude of the occa-

sion overwhelms them. Despair follows to urge the uselessness of action.

My heart softened at the thought.

"A place such as this is worth coming to," I said.

Her eyes filled with a piteous expression. What was its origin? Gratitude; the conviction flashed on me. She reminded me of a starving animal grateful for a crust.

"Yes. Because you feel you are away," she said.

"Away?"

"From the town. From the life you lead there. From life itself." She spoke rapidly but with feeling.

There was an awkward silence.

"Well!" I nodded and tried to suggest that I considered the interview closed. "Good-bye." I had gone some yards before she stopped me.

"Could you wait a minute?"

I came back.

"I've been thinking about you," she said. "In fact I was coming to see you."

"Come when you please. Or better still meet me at the Consulate."

She shook her head.

"I'd rather speak now. I shall say nothing to offend you."

Intuition had not deceived her. I had been nervous since my interview on Hugh's behalf. She had

then mistaken my motive. I had afterwards vowed she should never do so again. Candour, however, is always reassuring. My spirits rose.

"It is your fault," I reminded her.

"That you are afraid of me? You don't need to be. Really! I'm very unhappy. Sometimes I wish I had remained blind."

"Do you?"

"Yes. Life was less complicated. Then things left me in peace. Now they torment me, give me no rest."

"What things?"

"Those I see. Horrible things which I am forced to tolerate. Beautiful things which I may not have. Tell me, do you ever feel like this?"

"I hardly know. At any rate I think I understand."

There was a pause.

"Yes?" I said presently, for I wondered why she had detained me.

She shook her head. The stillness was broken by a man singing. There was the rattle of a stone. A youth upon a donkey turned a corner. He rode sidewise. His right hand rested on the donkey's head, his left belaboured it with a knotted stick. He swung his heels carelessly and sang of love with a frankness which proved his innocence. I thought he expressed the spirit of the hills, superbly tolerant, cruelly indifferent, free.

He checked his song to swear at the donkey and passed us without a glance.

"That is whom I envy," said Mabel Cain. "He sees only what he wishes."

She sat down, smoothing her skirt with a mechanical gesture. Her eyes grew troubled and very thoughtful. I chose a rock and sat down too. It was easy to study her for she seemed forgetful of my presence. Her former coquetry had vanished. She had become capable and unpretentious, a slim figure in a black frock. Her hat was small, her face ascetic. I could not understand her air of purpose.

She looked at me suddenly. I suppose her retrospect had led her to the present.

"Do you think I should marry Hugh?"

It was some seconds before I realized she was in earnest. My speculations were then dissipated. I was brought to earth with a crash and became single-minded.

"Miss Cain," I replied, "I do indeed! If that's what you've been considering pluck it from your heart. Hugh is counting on you. At this instant, while we talk in the sunshine, he is sitting in a room . . . in the dark . . ."

She interrupted:

"I know what blindness feels like."

"Then apply your knowledge. Consider what despair means to the blind. Hugh is sitting in the dark. Thinking of you. Longing for the time when you will bring him some happiness, a taste of the happiness which he once had but which he will otherwise never know. . . ."

"Oh, you're cruel! You torture me too!" She pressed her hands to her eyes, shivered, lowered her hands and grew calm. "You used to object to me marrying him."

"Yes. I objected. I would have done much to prevent your engagement. I did do much. I even tried to break your engagement. But now. . . ."

"What is the difference?"

"It's been born of circumstance. You've changed. And Hugh has become blind. Oh, God knows, so much has happened! And I wish it hadn't!"

"I wish that also."

I roused myself and went on:

"The time for regrets is past. We must act, not dream."

"Not dream! And I've only learnt how beautiful a dream may be!"

"Not dream; I repeat it, Miss Cain. We are all forced to abide by the consequences of our deeds. That's a simple truth but very startling when you realize it. I learnt it in the queerest way. Quite by chance. You've already referred to the evening we had our misunderstanding?"

"Misunderstanding, yes."

"After I left you I was greatly upset. I didn't know how to act, whether to tell Hugh. And then the darkness got hold of me and taught me great truths. The greatest was this: 'On every deed there is a tax and the tax must be paid somehow'; that is how I worded the truth. I saw Elba under

the stars. I remembered Napoleon and . . . and the memory confirmed the truth. . . . Well. I don't know if you can follow me. But I must give testimony to the faith that is in me."

I paused but she did not reply. She was nervously twisting a blade of grass. Her head was bent, her face told me nothing.

"Yes," I went on. "We are forced to abide by our deeds. The fact accounts for much of the mystery of pain. One good leads to another good. One evil leads to another evil. I believe the law to be irrevocable. Events are not isolated. They are in groups and none can occur without the whole."

"Does Hugh love me?"

"As few are able to love. He does everything passionately, you know."

"I know."

"Shall I tell you what he once wrote to me? It was while you were in Paris. You had just told him you could see and Hugh was in the seventh heaven. 'I could turn somersaults or leap the stars,' he said."

She shivered again.

"I can tell you something else," I began.

"No, I'd . . . I'd rather not. Believe me, Mr. Broom, I know you're right. Hugh loves me and he has sacrificed everything for my sake. My duty is to marry him. I quite understand." She sighed.

I replied warmly:

"It's your privilege. Hugh is one in a thousand and he deserves everything you can give him."

I was determined that Hugh should have an easy future. I was angry with her because she had unsettled my plans.

2

Of Lionel McBain I have lately said little for he does not deserve mention. He, like his kind, was ready to cause trouble but grudging of effort to right it. I had been spared his presence in my hotel for he had boarded the packet-boat on the day following the strike. The latter was over, the boat away. I had pictured McBain in England.

I was sitting on the terrace when a lithe boy stepped from a window and approached me. He informed me in a liquid murmur that "M'sieur Le Bain, one of my friends, he desired to see me."

Some seconds passed before I realized whom he meant. I then asked:

"M'sieur Cardinal's uncle, is it not?"

"Yes, m'sieur."

"Cause m'sieur to enter."

He disappeared. I settled my lips, braced my attention and frowned. Curiosity bade me see him. A refusal meant that I should have no peace of mind. Why was he here? Hugh was his nephew. No doubt. McBain, however, had not overemphasized the relationship.

He came before I had time for further reflection. His expression was as blank as usual. He still

clung to his morning-coat but his ring, I noticed, had disappeared. He stood in impressive silence and I was soon conscious of his breathing. The latter began to annoy me.

"Well?" I said.

"I should like a moment, if I may."

A similar phrase had heralded our last interview. God knows, its matter had been tragic enough. I am not usually superstitious but I confess that my heart failed me. My voice, however, I was able to command.

"You see me. I am doing nothing but brooding over many things which need not, I consider, have happened. You know my attitude towards you. If, even so, you want to talk to me . . ."

He interrupted:

"Even so."

"Well then, sit down."

He shook his head. There was another silence and his breathing grew heavier. My irritation reached its climax and I exclaimed:

"A bird of ill-omen!"

"I beg your pardon." His tone was measured.

"Oh, don't do that! I suppose I should beg yours. I had no intention of being rude. But I can't understand why you are here."

"My visit concerns my reason."

"In that case, sit down. I really must insist."

He now obeyed. The chair which he took had broad arms. He so placed it that I saw him partly in profile. I promptly changed my position. He

kept his countenance, but I think he was vexed.

"How is Hugh?" he asked suddenly.

"His life is in no danger. I don't know if that's what you mean."

"I called at his house."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I called at his house. But they would not allow me to see him."

"He could not *see* you." I spoke quietly.

The effect of my words was astonishing. McBain rested his elbows on his knees and pressed his hands to his face. The gesture was not theatrical, he neither sobbed nor quivered. His body, on the contrary, appeared to shrink, his cheek-bones grew very noticeable. The man had been suffering; I was willing to swear to that.

The incident closed before I had time to speak. He straightened his shoulders and said:

"Forgive me. I am not myself."

"Don't you think . . ."

He interrupted:

"But you should not have said what you said."

"Why pretend that . . ."

"You should not have said what you said."

"Well. No. Perhaps not. I am sorry."

He studied me. His eyes, bright and speculative, irresistibly reminded me of a lizard's. They were just as active, just as soulless.

His face presently twitched and he leant back.

"You blame me," he said. "You have told me. But I did not intend to injure Hugh. Responsi-

bility implies intention. Why should I wish to injure him? He wasn't attempting to thwart me."

"Would you injure every one who went against you?"

"I would."

"Then I cannot congratulate you on your charity."

He did not reply. I became uncomfortable under his scrutiny. Was there a flicker of derision in his eyes? I at least thought so and the fancy increased my discomfort. It was he who should have felt uncomfortable. It was he who had brought disaster.

I failed to catch a remark and said sharply:

"Beg pardon?"

"Nothing." He pursed his lips.

"I insist."

"Then nothing of importance. I commented on the fact that you are still young. Merely a thought spoken inadvertently."

I frowned. He continued to observe me and I found his expression peculiar.

"Yes," he began. "You are still young. Refreshing. Vain of your victories! But that is the way of a young man! Victories! How do you know they are not defeats?"

"Ridiculous," I muttered.

"Time alone will show." He smiled.

I repressed a desire to hit him. His face again grew inscrutable. It was, I decided, like an act-drop. You were conscious of activity behind it

and irritated because you could not witness that activity.

"Defeats!" His tone grew reflective, he ceased to regard me. "They are usually inflicted crudely. The vanquished are vanquished indeed — and therefore spurred to fresh rebellion. The victors. . . . Well. Most of us are Romans. We cannot resist a triumph. But the modern Turk is more deadly. He profits by simulating loss. There, I say, is the real victory." He paused. "May I ask if you have studied ju-jitsu?"

I again ignored him.

"The principle," he went on, "is the same. Take with the gesture of a giver. Your opponent will believe you the giver. Oh, it is fetching! It is a fetching trick!"

I rose and turned my back.

"Don't you think so?" I heard him say. "But no. You would not. You are immature."

"Listen! I'm not going to stand this. You sit there and calmly insult me. Well, I won't have it. Keep civil. Do you hear? Keep civil or I'll turn you out." I looked away.

His silence was so unnatural that my back began to creep. The thought of an attack was not reassuring. I pictured his method — swift, quiet, methodical. I fought the temptation to look at him.

"Please sit down," he said suddenly.

I was so relieved that I obeyed. Does the confession imply cowardice? I do not think so. I

had controlled my inclinations as long as self-control was necessary.

"Listen to me." His expression had become sombre. There was not a trace of the derision I had previously suspected.

"Well?" I said.

"You accused me of a lack of charity."

"I accuse you again."

"I do not profess charity. Why reproach me with the lack of that which I do not profess? At least you cannot accuse me of hypocrisy. I have my principles, my code, though perhaps they are not yours. And I do not fear to declare them."

"What is your code?"

"Just self."

My scorn disappeared. There was something fine in his candour. His creed might be wrong but it was living. I have known believers in a nobler creed who practised it less faithfully.

"Don't mistake me," he went on. "I have said I am no hypocrite. But by that I mean. . . ." He considered. "I mean that you may be always sure as to my end. My method of reaching it could be crooked, I think. You see, I must be true to self."

I maliciously put in:

"Then you can't object if others are true to self."

"Eh?"

"You can't object if they act crookedly towards you."

"But I do indeed. I am I."

His candour I have called fine. Fine? Yes. It was growing bewildering, however. The interview was too confidential. We were about to argue and argument, I believe, is the prerogative of friendship. I averted my eyes. The Place St. Nicolas was forlorn. A bleak wind, herald of the mistral, whistled through the empty bandstand. The rasp of the palm leaves had a strange staccato emphasis.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Do you know, sir?" He leant forward. "I wish I could act impulsively."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I should go away. Anywhere. At once." He moistened his lips. "Since the boat sailed I have been living where? Yonder. In that filthy hovel. You can just see it. Across the harbour. And I have lived in fear of my life."

I looked in the direction indicated. I could not distinguish the "hovel" in question but the district was scarcely fashionable.

"Why?"

"You are a very obtuse young man."

"Upon my word!" I rose angrily.

"But indeed you are." He was so positive, so quiet, that my anger perforce decreased. "Have I the wings of a bird?" he continued. "I have not. I cannot travel without the price of a ticket."

It was some time before his meaning dawned on me. My reason then refused to accept it. I could only murmur:

"Come, come, McBain! That won't do. You have plenty of money."

"Twenty-five francs. My week's lodging must be paid tonight. Then I shall be left with four francs."

I closely studied him and realized that he was speaking the truth. His waistcoat was slack, his trousers sagged, his morning-coat had ceased to fit him but there was still something compelling in the set of his shoulders.

A dull spark of anger had slowly been brightening within me. It suddenly burst into flames. I scornfully said:

"You led me to believe you were comfortably off! Then you calmly admit you've been lying! Is your self-respect dead?"

"Very much alive. This interview stings me like a wet whip."

"Why did you seek it?"

"You must give me money."

"Oh, indeed!" I stared at him, then repeated:
"Oh, indeed!"

He had puzzled me. What could I say? To call him selfish would be ludicrous. You cannot reproach a man with the adjective in which he glories.

Incredulity once more possessed me.

"Oh, nonsense!" I exclaimed. "You are a leading man. Hugh told me so."

"Was a leading man."

"Eh?"

"Was a leading man. I shall never be so again."

"Why not?"

"I broke my contract. I had to break my contract! But they do not understand. Till now I have lived in hope. But this morning. . . . A letter . . . the first since the strike. . . ." He turned aside. "I am black-listed," he moaned. "No good. And this malady, this cursed malady. . . ."

"What malady?" I sharply broke off: "No, don't answer me. I know. You scoundrel!" I said in a low voice.

"I once told you I had had my misfortunes."

"But never your deserts. I hope you may get them now! I hope the father of the girl, this girl in Vizzavona. . . ." Indignation choked me. "I won't lend you."

"Won't?"

I shook my head.

"Oh, go, go! Seek your relatives, seek your friends. I may be lacking in charity too, but as God hears me, I can't forgive you at present."

He raised his hands, then allowed them to sink on his knees. There was something fatalistic in the gesture.

"I have no friends, no relatives but Hugh. Something must be done. It is monstrous that I should suffer like this." He stood up. "Lend me a thousand francs."

"No."

"Five hundred."

"No. You must face consequences."

"Consequences? I think not. There is generally another way. In fact there is always a way. Provided one has enterprise, enterprise and self-reliance."

"Have you these?"

"I would risk death to save my life." He turned abruptly and descended to the garden. I watched him crossing the Place.

He marched confidently without looking back. His arms swung by his side. The treacherous wind would have lifted his hat but he foiled its attempt neatly.

3

"Dear Mr. Broom — Hugh is anxious that you should see him. Today the bandage was removed. He is up reconnoitring a new world."

This pencilled note was delivered while I yet loitered on the terrace. It was not signed but the neat writing was Miss Gay's. I entered the hotel, found my hat and went out. My confidence was shaken. I dared not battle with the wind so I skirted the Place. The tall houses afforded me protection.

I reached the ground which surrounded Hugh's villa. The waste, I reflected, was like an average life. The sunshine bathed it critically. God was searching for a fruitful patch. There was none. A ragged carpet of withered grass had long smothered what man attempted. No enterprise here!

I came to the gate and jangled the bell. Many minutes passed. A shoot of ivy fascinated me for it swayed and bobbed in the wind as if alive and derisive.

Costa at length opened the door. His dark eyes flashed, his knees bent and he bowed. He swept an arm in invitation. I followed him through the long garden, which was better kept than I had yet seen it. Miss Gay was making her presence felt.

We entered the house. Costa led me up the cracking staircase then left me to announce myself. I tapped at the door and a sober voice, which I scarcely recognized, invited me to "come along." The door swung back. Hugh was by the open window. He sat in a deep armchair. His face graver and more spiritualized, was not that of an invalid but the forehead was disfigured by an angry scar. The familiar dressing-gown now fitted him loosely; I could hardly believe he had once filled it. I noticed, too, that his hair was brushed! He seemed to be indifferent to his shrivelled hand for it lay conspicuous upon his knee.

I hurried to prevent him rising.

"No, no! Stay as you are."

He allowed me to restrain him but said:

"I'm not paralysed, you know."

"Of course you're not! Presently you will get about everywhere. We'll take a long walk towards Cap Corse. Among those vines. And in a few months . . . your sight . . . perhaps. . ."

"Oh, there's no question about that, Aubrey!"

His tone was again sober but I could detect nothing of his wonted pessimism. He spoke as one who had examined and accepted the future.

I studied him more closely. He had gained distinction. There was a quiet dignity in his attitude and his delicate lips were austere. He seemed to think more impartially and was in consequence less impulsive. His voice, still deep, had steadied and ceased to be peevish.

The logic of silence! I have noted its power in an earlier chapter. A volume, however, might be written concerning its results and concerning those of its complement, the refinement of suffering. The latter frees us from selfish motives, ennobles our ideals, tests our faith. It is, moreover, the grand forcing-house of humour for true laughter may only succeed tears. . . .

These reflections were interrupted by a scuffling at the door. I had left it ajar. It now swung open and Teddy was upon me in a moment. His excitement presently abated and he trotted to Hugh, whined, placed his paws on his knees. Hugh's hand groped for an instant then rested on the dog's head.

"It's funny to depend on touch," he said. "It tells you things which you would never otherwise learn."

"Things about Teddy?"

"Not only Teddy. . . . He's an honest little beast. Doesn't approve of my new disability. I believe he considers it bad form"

There was a pause. Hugh sympathetically smiled.

"Congratulations, by the way. I was hearing the *Bookshelf* review. You're a great nut these days!"

"Miss Gay read it to you?"

"Yes." He grew grave again. "She has read to me a lot. I don't know how to thank her. Her voice, for a time, was the only thing which consoled me."

"I once told you her voice was beautiful."

"Yes. I remember you once told me."

"When she heard of your accident. . . ." I stopped. "You don't mind me mentioning it?"

"Why should I?"

"Some would mind." I repressed a sigh. "Oh, Hugh, I came to congratulate and now I'm about to condole. I can't help it."

"I know, Aubrey. Don't be too sorry, though."

"Life meant much to you. Your heady blood. . . ." I checked myself.

A smile flickered on his lips. He remarked.

"Now it's a case of 'my bloody head.'"

The pun might be feeble but it startled me. Its humour was more honest, more spontaneous, less bitter, less childish than that in which he had formerly indulged. I said without thinking:

"What a difference!"

"Eh? Oh, yes! I see what you mean. Perhaps. But one . . . well . . . grows up." He yawned easily. "I've been thinking a good deal.

It's easier to think with your eyes closed. There are compensations for being blind. A blind man is spared distractions. I was rather a fool in the old days. Childish and theatrical; you once called me those hard names. Do you know, Aubrey, you were absolutely right."

There were light footsteps without.

"That is Miss Gay," said Hugh.

Teddy whined then expectantly rushed to the door. I remarked:

"He seems fond of her."

"I'm going to give him to her."

"Won't you find that hard?"

"I shall I'm afraid. But I have given her very little."

"Has Mabel been to you lately?"

"She's coming."

"Then I must not tire you. I'll leave you alone."

He did not try to detain me.

"You should marry soon," I said from the door.

"Yes. I must marry soon."

I meant what I said. He required that attention which only a wife could provide. The marriage, once objectionable, now seemed the best solution of the problem.

4

I went back to the hotel and paced the terrace. The wind gathered strength. The horizon was

flecked with copper clouds. Little blue waves danced uncertainly then tumbled in creamy cascades. The boat for Nice, though in the harbour, heaved and strained as if conscious of the stormy passage which awaited her. A few travellers were already going on board.

I turned at a sound. The owner of the hotel was beside me. He had once commanded a cargo ship so he took an interest in the sea. I offered him a cigarette, which he lit with difficulty, and we stood in silence watching the waves.

"There's a breeze now," I ventured.

He rumbled a laugh.

"Yes. They will dance this evening."

"Pardon?"

"They will dance this evening, the passengers for France. There'll be sea-sickness." He spat.

I nodded.

"Here," he said suddenly. "About that gentleman who visited you today. He's the uncle of M'sieur Cardinal, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" There was an eloquent silence. "Very rich, no doubt?"

"You believe we are all rich, we English. Why do you ask such a question?"

He did not reply.

"Dame!" he said explosively. "He's a comic, this uncle of M'sieur Cardinal! He presents himself to the captain. Begs to be carried to Nice

tonight. For what? For nothing, do you see? My faith! One does not sail a packet-boat for love of holy charity."

He was right. I knew what it meant to depend on the world's bounty. McBain had brought his misfortunes on himself. I did not wish to pity him but could not help doing so. There was something horrible in the way he was placed. Destitute, baffled and desperate he was snapping at every chance. His position was that of a trapped wolf. Enterprise? He had threatened action, spoken of enterprise. But what could he do? Money is the bed rock of enterprise.

I said thoughtlessly:

"The captain might have taken him all the same."

"For nothing?" My companion spat.

I raised my shoulders and became silent. Argument was useless. I wondered, however, what I should do were I in McBain's place. Poverty is dreadful; I shall never believe otherwise. To live frugally may benefit the soul but to live by one's wits is demoralizing.

I suddenly felt I had exceeded my powers. McBain had never injured me. Hugh alone had the right to deny him. Let Hugh follow his conscience. My duty was to do the same.

The proprietor turned away.

"You are going in?" I asked him.

"Yes."

“Then please tell the waiter I may be late for dinner this evening.”

I had made up my mind to help McBain. I determined to seek him at once.

CHAPTER II

MABEL CAIN'S SOLUTION

1

THE southern day ended as I left the Place St. Nicolas. A pearly twilight followed. The sea grew grey and angry with the wind. The latter, herald of the mistral, was now the mistral itself. The mop-headed palm trees drooped and swayed. A bitter taste was on my lips, a great desolation in my heart. The unlatched shutter of a neighbouring house opened with the crack of a stock-whip.

I panted relief as I entered the Cours Sebastiani. To pause would have helped but the wind behind me was pitiless. It drove me past the Hôtel de Ville. I crossed the square and escaped it in the Rue Pino, a mean street, ancient and narrow, which darkness was already possessing. I had now reached the poorest quarter and McBain's lodging was near. He had pointed it out from the hotel so I knew it must face the sea.

A passing youth stopped to watch me and I took the chance to enquire:

"Knowest thou an English gentleman who dwells hereabouts?" There was something paradoxical

in my choice of words. I wanted to smile but kept my countenance.

The youth politely advanced.

"It's the penniless gentleman who sometimes sings?"

I felt sure it was and said so. The description fitted McBain. What a downfall that it should fit him! His life had once been a chain of triumphs but was now a litter of broken links! His voice had once been the justification of his life but was now regarded as a mere accomplishment! The justice of God is not only sure but sometimes poetic and apparent.

I became aware that the youth was directing me.

"He dwells at Madame Baretti's. Turn to the left at the Rue du Mole."

I thanked him and passed on. The wind again caught me as I entered the Rue du Mole. I flattened my back against a door. It opened unexpectedly and I burst in upon a large family who were eating their evening meal. They all stood up and gazed disapprovingly.

"Madame Baretti?" I murmured.

A chorus replied:

"Next door."

I gathered my wits and made an apology. A small boy escorted me to the door, which he carefully closed behind me.

With bent head I fought the wind. It was no time for ceremony. McBain's lodging was before me so I entered without knocking and found myself

in a bare stone-flagged room. A muslined bed was conspicuous. There were two crucifixes on the walls. A jar of roses graced the mantelpiece and a second doorway had cotton curtains. The place, though poor, was clean.

McBain had been kneeling by his suit-case but he rose the moment I appeared. We regarded one another suspiciously. His first expression was one of alarm but it soon changed, soon grew insolent.

He dusted his hands deliberately, drew up a chair, sat down with his back to the curtained doorway. The tips of his fingers presently touched. He crossed his legs and leant back.

"Well, Mr. Broom?" His voice was devoid of expression.

I did not know how to begin.

"Come," he went on, closing his eyes. "Do what you will, heap me with indignities. I am at your mercy because for the moment I am poor. You have violated my privacy without even a 'by your leave.' It is a good beginning. Continue as you have begun."

His method of description was hardly fair but it gained what he wanted; it put me in the wrong.

"I'm sorry," I told him. "You must make allowances. It is impossible in the street. Listen to the wind."

"May it blow this island to perdition."

I shivered. There was a finality in his tone which showed he meant what he said. The remark was not a figure of speech. I reflected:

"So might a devil pray."

"Well?" he repeated.

"May I sit down?"

"I'd sooner you took yourself to Jericho."

His hospitality was not pressing but I had come determined to avoid a quarrel. There was another chair. It was piled with shirts so I sat upon the bed and he did not try to prevent me.

He said for the third time:

"Well?"

"I've decided to help you. This afternoon you caught me unprepared. One is naturally cruel. There's a primitive joy in attacking a man when he's down. But reflection has taught me better. After all I'm not your judge."

"Cut them out. Keep those platitudes for a sermon."

"What's that, what's that?" I was so taken aback that I am afraid my jaw dropped.

He laughed cynically.

"Shove those platitudes. . . ." He checked himself. "Well, cut them out anyway."

"I have come to help you," I told him.

"I don't want your help."

His voice was harsh but elated. One thing alone could cause that elation: he must have found help elsewhere.

The notion, however, seemed preposterous. Where could he seek in so short a time? I recalled the words of the ex-captain. His attitude was typical. Men were adamant where their money was

concerned. "One does not sail a packet-boat for love of holy charity."

My thought rose to my lips.

"Impossible."

"Anything is more possible than the possibility I should be defeated."

"Who has given you money?"

He ignored the question and said:

"The worst fix I have yet been in. Perhaps I doubted for a moment. And now I have escaped! I shall never doubt myself again."

"You don't need my help?"

"I'm sorry that I ever invited it."

My conscience was clear. There was no need to be insulted. I rose abruptly.

"In that case I'll go."

He nodded judicially.

I was picking up my hat when the unexpected happened. There was a quick step and the rustle of a skirt. Mabel Cain appeared in the doorway which the cotton curtain had concealed. She did not glance at me, I am doubtful if she saw me. Her eyes, dark with apprehension, were fastened on Lionel McBain. The doorway framed her admirably. Her extended hands kept the curtains apart, one foot was a trifle in advance. The unconscious pose might have been practised through many rehearsals.

My hat slipped from my fingers. I gasped and gazed at her incredulously. My body was powerless but my brain busy. The fact is worthy of at-

tention. We cannot bear the unknown, our greatest need is to explain the inexplicable. Reassuring theories were already forming in my heart. She had either followed me from the hotel or entered the house by chance.

I became aware that McBain was watching me. My eyes met his, my lips parted for a question. It was never spoken. He bounded from his chair with dreadful agility, crossed the room and locked the door to the street. I stepped forward but he placed his hand on the key.

The thought of resistance entered my mind. I put it aside. McBain was powerful. Self-indulgence might have weakened him but he was still more than my match. Something had made him desperate. I have already compared him to a wolf in a trap. He was now like a wolf at bay.

He slowly relaxed, turned the key and stood back.

"I acted on an instinct," he said deliberately. "You may go."

I was not sure that I wanted to go. The situation called for an explanation. I looked at him hard and did not move.

I turned in the end to Mabel Cain. She had placed a hand on her breast as though in fear of her throbbing heart. She had partially closed her eyes as though in pleasure at some unique experience. I could not read her expression but wilfulness and melancholy were both conspicuous.

"Miss Cain," I said, "why are you here?"

Her hand fell to her side. She threw me a glance then looked away. The gesture was one of indifference. She might have similarly glanced at a child interrupting a serious argument.

"Well. I must have an explanation." I turned to McBain. "You! Why is she here?"

I no longer feared him. He had grown afraid of me. His lips were pale, his cheeks trembled but he stood his ground.

"I have done what I must. Deeds belong to me but not their guilt. I have acted according to my light."

The answer was no answer. I left him for the moment and returned to Mabel Cain. She had lost her indifference; resentment appeared to have succeeded it. Her hands were clasped, her breast heaving.

"I must have an explanation," I repeated.

She unclasped her hands for a moment.

"Oh, let him have his explanation! Then perhaps we shall be quiet, then perhaps he will leave us alone."

"Us?"

"You were offering him money. I was in the other room and I heard you. That is why I came. You were bribing him. I'll fight that anywhere."

There was a terrible pause. Terrible? Yes. I use the word with intention. Some pauses are terrible. You hold your breath while something happens which a sixth sense divines.

The silence was emphasized by a lull without.

The gale then redoubled its strength. Such a gust swept down as I had never experienced. The door rattled, the house shook, a child screamed in the distance.

"Oh!" I exclaimed in a bated voice. The truth had dawned on me. Something in her attitude revealed it.

I looked at McBain.

"So this is the end? You have come with your discord to this island of peace. You have sown misery, broken hearts, caused another to suffer for you. But now you have committed the unforgivable sin, almost the sin of the beasts."

"Whatever has happened is my fault."

I started. Mabel Cain was transformed. Her tone was militant, the look she gave him fond.

"Listen," she began. "When you first came here, when you first knew me, I wasn't alive. I just flitted through life like a shadow. Life did with me as it pleased. Why should I care? And I did nothing with life. Plenty to eat, nothing to do. These were my ambitions, mean little pleasures. They satisfied my soul, for it was mean also.

"I thought of Hugh and decided to marry him. I schemed and planned and you brought us together. Oh! I tell you, it was easy. Passions were my puppets for I stood outside of them. And I laughed at you both. At you because you did what I wanted. Yes. You couldn't withstand me! Deny it if you like now. You did what I

expected and I became engaged. This, I thought, was a triumph. Then Miss Gay told me I could get back my sight. This, I thought, would be a crowning glory. I was frightened of pain but I faced it, went to Paris. There were days of fear, a morning of dreams. And then I was born, I saw.

"When you next knew me, when I met you at Marseilles, I was like some one raised from the dead. Everything was sweet, everything wonderful. I could make myself mad by looking at the sunshine. I can still do it! The things you see! Oh, you don't understand! You have never been cheated. I grudge the night for I've been cheated of so many days.

"I looked at Hugh and joy left me. You may not understand that either. I didn't. Not at first. I told myself to endure him. He could give me a life of ease, he could give me plenty to eat. The old arguments but now I couldn't believe in them. I couldn't believe I had ever believed in them for my eyes were dazzled with the beauty of the world. Beauty was my passion. I had myself become a puppet." She turned to McBain. "It was only last week that I met you. But I love you. Is it strange, I wonder, that I am so candid? Nothing matters but you. You are my hero, you are my god. I'll follow you anywhere you will."

2

I slipped from the room in the silence which followed. The situation had escaped me. Desire!

What a mystery it is! Why should she desire McBain? He was stout, middle-aged, undistinguished. I felt sure he had never pretended to love her. He had no money and must have confessed as much to her. His career was shattered, his health a menace to hers. Hugh, on the other hand, was noble, clean and a lover.

Hugh! A river of bitterness flowed in my heart at the thought of him. Life was monstrously unfair. It had a single purpose, the breaking of the stalwart. Honesty is seldom the better policy. Men toil and refrain and are pushed aside. Men play and indulge and are given everything. Life bewildered me, my faith hung by a thread.

The gale had steadied to a strong wind likely to blow for many days. A full moon cast a wild light on the hills, the dry air was pungent with myrtle. A chill had come down with the evening, there were few people in the streets. . . .

I reached the station and the chill increased. Corsica is a land of surprises. The most trifling elevation affects the temperature. You pass from the climate of Greece to that of Provence, from that of Provence to that of Switzerland and you do so in a few minutes. The Consulate stood above the town. The wind, in consequence, had a northern sting. It moaned through the trees as I have heard it moan in Marseilles. Costa might well be asleep. The ringing of the bell would be merged in the clamour of the wind.

I paused at the gate and skirted the wall of the

garden. Abandoned gas-works lay near and the villa had once belonged to them. A little gate had connected the grounds and it was through this that fate had stolen upon Hugh. Costa had for months been intending to repair the lock but the latter was still unrepaired.

The gate opened at my touch. I climbed a path of shallow steps. The garden wall sheltered me. The wind passed above with the sound of an air-ship. I reached the house and mounted to the terrace. Long rectangles of soft light filled the windows of the sitting-room but they were not open. I approached the nearest and knocked insistently on the glass.

Hugh was alone with Miss Gay. She held a book and I think she had been reading aloud. Her back was to the window. Hugh faced her from a basket chair. His thoughtful expression, patient and attentive, was already typical of his infirmity. His hands rested on the arms of his chair and he leant forward as though he were seeing her.

I had just time to notice these details before my knocking disturbed them.

Miss Gay rose in confusion. She presently dropped her book and shielded Hugh as if from the menace of a gun. I knocked again.

"Who is it?" she called in French. Her tone, though anxious was firm.

My state of bitterness became unendurable. I was angry with my news, angry with God. A brutal surgeon is often the most tender of men.

Brutality is the armour of the sensitive. I yielded to it then with a perverse pleasure, embraced it as a means of escape from sentiment.

"Open!" I shouted, rattling at the window. "Open at once or I'll break the glass."

"It's Mr. Broom!" I could not hear but I read the words from her lips.

Her relief might be flattering but it left me cold. I had come on a mission of torture. God had designed a fresh cruelty and had chosen me executioner.

"Good!" I reflected. "I'll be thorough in my work."

Miss Gay picked up the book, placed it on her chair, came to the window and flung it wide.

I pushed past her then stood irresolute by the table. My madness had left me. I saw the situation stripped of romance. Hugh, my friend, weak and undefended, was before me; I had a sad story to tell him, one which would increase his wretchedness. There was nothing in my heart but sorrow, nothing on my lips but sympathy.

Miss Gay closed the window, locked it then hurried to my side.

"Oh, what is it? You are ill? You have seen something terrible?"

Hugh had meanwhile been listening. His head was tilted, his face drawn. He now said in a strained voice:

"Tell me what has happened, Aubrey. I . . . I can't bear this waiting in the dark."

My whole aim had been to spare him. I replied unnaturally:

"It's nothing. Or at least. . . ." I stopped.

"That's rubbish, Aubrey. I can tell by your breathing. You are breathing as if you had run a mile."

"The wind is high and I daresay I did run."

"Why?"

"Listen, Hugh!"

"Oh, why, why! God, man, don't keep me in suspense."

He suddenly rose, attempted to reach me but collided with the table and stumbled. Miss Gay ran forward and caught his arm. The shock had frightened him and he allowed her to lead him to a chair.

I said gravely:

"Mabel."

The word affected him like a blow. He started forward then subsided.

"Oh, you mustn't! You must be very quiet," said Miss Gay. She threw me a glance of reproach.

That glance stung me afresh.

"Yes. It's very well to look at me! 'Don't hurt him,' you would say. But how can I help hurting him? Well. Blame God. I'm blaming Him. It's He Who is making me His accomplice."

She interrupted gently:

"God's gifts are so rare that we sometimes fear them."

Her simplicity calmed me. I drew up a chair, sat down and narrated unemotionally the facts I had come to make known.

"And this is the truth," I concluded. "She is mad, determined, deaf to reason. He has turned her brain, possessed her like an evil spirit. I know she has broken your heart. But, Hugh! Hearts mend. Oh, Hugh! If yours . . . when yours mends, see that she is gone from it!"

I had spoken with averted eyes but I now ventured to look at him. My story had whitened his cheeks; he seemed older, sadder but less stricken than I had dared hope. Did he not understand what had happened? There is a stage of suffering when its magnitude defies our reckoning.

He shaded his face with his hand. I found his silence unbearable.

"For God's sake, speak, man!"

"She is gone already."

"What?" I thought for a moment that his mind had failed him, that he was dully commenting on his loss.

An alternate theory presented itself. It was wild, delightful. I dared not consider it but looked at Miss Gay and saw she was harbouring it too.

Hugh lowered his hand.

"Will you both hear me?" he began. "Try to forget who is speaking. I'm a stranger you are hearing for the first time. Try to forget that you think you know me. You don't know me. Miss Gay served a tyrant and you, Aubrey, reasoned

with a fool. I was blind then. What did I live for? Just for my senses. The face of the world dazzled me. I couldn't pay attention to its soul.

"I can see now, Aubrey! Men sleep too much. If men would lie through a long night, close the shutters, blow out the lamp and lie awake through a single night! What miseries they would save themselves! Papers would go bankrupt. There'd be no tragedies to fill them.

"I'm a sick man and Miss Gay says I must be quiet. But I'll tell you this: things are not what they seem. Does the cliché disappoint you? Knew it already? Eh? You knew it, Aubrey, as you know the certainty of death. We know it so well that we cease to regard it. You cannot impart a truth. Every one must find it for himself.

"I'm a sick man tonight. I've come through an experience. I must be quiet now, must be very quiet. But I'm going to say this if it breaks me. If sight is concerned with the truth then blind as I am I've been led to see. To see what? The utter insincerity of my fancied love. Mabel was a fancy . . . a glamour . . . I don't love her, I can't love her. . . . Mabel. . . . You. . . . Ellen. . . . All as you are. I know you at last. . . ."

His voice had been gaining in strength. It suddenly failed him. He leaned back and his face grew peaceful. Miss Gay bent over him.

"You're not to talk, not to tire yourself."

"I can't love her. . . . I can still love."

He spoke in a whisper but she heard him. She

was pale and incredulous for a moment. I heard her repeating:

“God’s gifts are so rare that we sometimes fear them.”

“Ellen.” He put out his hand and she dropped on her knees by his side. . . .

3

Desire? What a mystery it is! The thought recurred to me. She was quaint, confused, triumphant. Miss Gay, a “plain spinster”! The years fell from her. Ellen Gay, the devotee! Youth cannot die; it is but another name for the soul. . . .

I left them together and braved the mistral once again. Unnecessary suffering is the greatest of all tragedies. I wanted to prevent it now. I wanted a word with Mabel Cain. Not only passion was driving her to ruin; fear, I knew, played a part. She believed that Hugh would claim her and the thought must add to her recklessness. I hoped to part her from McBain with the news that she was safe from Hugh.

I reached McBain’s lodging. The window was dark, the door would not yield and no one replied to my knocking. I knocked louder and a neighbour appeared.

“Where,” I cried, “is Madame Barette?”

“The Englishman paid her this afternoon. Since then she is with her brother who dwells at Furiani.

“ And the Englishman? Where does he find himself? ”

“ Because of the mistral.”

She must have thought I was asking the cause of her neighbour's delay. I sighed and repeated my question.

“ Oh, the Englishman! He's gone off to the boat with ma'm'selle.”

I ran through the Rue Pino. There was no time to waste, the boat would soon start. The wind sang in my ears, the blood rose to my cheeks. I glanced at my watch as I sped along the Cours Sebastiani. Fifteen minutes! Well. My arguments must be sharp and short.

I passed the hotel a minute later, cautiously skirted the Ancien Port but on the long quay I paused. The boat had disappeared. I was so bewildered that I walked to the edge and looked down at the black water.

Two men were coiling a rope and no one else was to be seen. I went forward and asked for the boat.

“ It will be a rough passage,” said one. “ He started earlier because of that.”

The other pointed in silence. I looked out upon the sea, a grey-green desert of tumbling pyramids. Three winking lights were frantically bobbing in the storm. Some clouds swept over the moon, there would be snow tomorrow on the mountains. . . .

The lights disappeared and I raised my hat . . .

as though the earth were falling on the grave of Mabel Cain. Dead, that is what she seemed to me and she had therefore passed beyond censure.

CHAPTER III

A SECOND GLIMPSE

1

I HAD a long letter last week. It was written by Miss Gay but dictated by Hugh.

“MARSEILLES, 4th, March, 1920.

“My Dear Aubrey:

“I’m writing, or rather, Ellen’s writing to send you our new address. I expect you will wonder what has brought us here. To put it plainly, it’s the need of bread and boots and ‘vin rouge ordinaire’ (very much ‘ordinaire’). I’ve got a job to tutor some kiddies in the mysteries of the English language. Now don’t you go pitying me! They are nice kiddies though a Parisian would weep at their provincialism. I’ve already persuaded them that not every Englishman is a peer and I’ve taught them how to pronounce *Auchtermuchty* correctly; I bet that’s more than the President can do! They’re the offspring of wealthy ‘bourgeois,’ so I’m paid pretty decently. And Ellen, as you know, has a couple of hundred a year so we rub along nicely — at the present rate of exchange!

“Marseilles, on the whole, is noisy and smelly. I know you’ve got leading opinions on the matter.

‘Gateway to the desert.’ ‘Reunion of three continents.’ ‘Fascinating and fearful.’ All the rest of them. No doubt but I take it you wouldn’t care to live here. Well. I don’t mind twopence — honestly, Aubrey, I don’t. We are far too particular about places. Happiness, after all, depends on what we do, not on where we live. Do you remember the tragedies I used constantly to be making out of nothing? I stalked through life with a grievance, looking, as it were, for the fellow who was twisting me. That fellow was myself all the time. Nothing would have pleased me in those days — not a castle in Spain nor a cottage in Cornwall nor a deer forest nor a desert nor a steam-yacht. I was passionately eager for a quiet life but took good care I didn’t get it!

“Ellen is objecting to all this. She says ‘I’m not being fair to myself.’ (I’ve told her to put that in inverted commas and I hope she has obeyed.) She thinks I’m a lanky deity specially designed for the surplus worship from her saints. Well. I’m going to punish her for objecting. I’m going to make her write what she’ll like still less. It’s just this, Aubrey: we’re going to be parents pretty soon. I wouldn’t tell a soul but you. In spite of my years in this country I’ve still got the average Briton’s reticence. Now here’s the curious point. Ellen hasn’t! She’s just informed me that she’s proud of the news and doesn’t mind telling you a bit. Is that French influence or the primitive feminine, do you think?

“We’re both certain it’s to be a boy and for the life of me I don’t know what to do. He’ll be brought up a Catholic of course. That’s part of the conditions I agreed to and I quite believe they’re wise. Only this, Aubrey. A boy is naturally more fond of his mother than of his father. What will happen in my case? Ellen will teach him creeds. He’ll go to Mass with her and meet priests. I do none of these things, take not the slightest part in them. Aubrey, I’m frightened he grows up to resent me as a silent antagonist of his mother. God knows and Ellen knows I’m not that and never will be.

“Yet I’m tempted to become a Catholic myself. I like being present at a Mass and the Catholic creed is the finest creed in the world. If Christianity’s true, Catholicism must be true. But is Christianity true? There’s the rub, Aubrey. I wish you could help me. Don’t send unintelligible messages but tell me simply your personal experiences. And if you won’t object to some extra wear on your trousers, I’d honestly like you to worry heaven a little on my behalf. I’m not going to worry! No, thanks. I’ve learnt my lesson where that is concerned. I’m just going to follow my conscience and not look ahead.

“Is it easy to write books? Don’t curse me for that question. It’s intended seriously. I feel I could write a book. I’m constantly learning things—things about the world, things about people—which I’d never have suspected if I weren’t blind.

It's a great puzzle but I think in the end comes to this: one man's meat is another's poison. I don't prescribe blindness for every one. In my case it's saved me but in another case it might mean ruin. No event is good or bad in itself. They are good or bad according to their effect and their effect will always be different.

"You'll be soon passing through Marseilles? Look us up if you can resist the Hôtel de Louvre.

"Remember my requests. A bientôt alors!

"Yours ever,

"HUGH F. CARDINAL."

2

I read this letter again and again for it gave me pleasure. Hugh had signed it himself. The writing, though crooked, was firmer than of old.

A postscript followed but it had not been dictated by Hugh. Miss Gay — I cannot think of her as Mrs. Cardinal — had added a message which I give as she wrote it.

"He's really happy and more of a dear than ever. I'm a lucky girl, *deliriously* happy for I believe his happiness is just a little bit helped by me. But that's not what I wanted to say. I wanted to tell you we've had news of Mabel Cain. Poor soul! She was starving on the streets of Barcelona — why Barcelona I don't know. I'm sure she must be sorry she didn't remain blind. In that case she'd have married Hugh. Hugh and I are trying to get her some help. But he wouldn't let me tell

you all this. He says that memories, like dead leaves, are better left undisturbed."

Memories, like dead leaves, are better left undisturbed! It was a fine phrase worthy of its originator. I could hear in fancy his deep voice speak it slowly while the city throbbed outside his window, while the noise contributed to the peace which he had won so strangely.

EXITUS ACTA PROBAT

